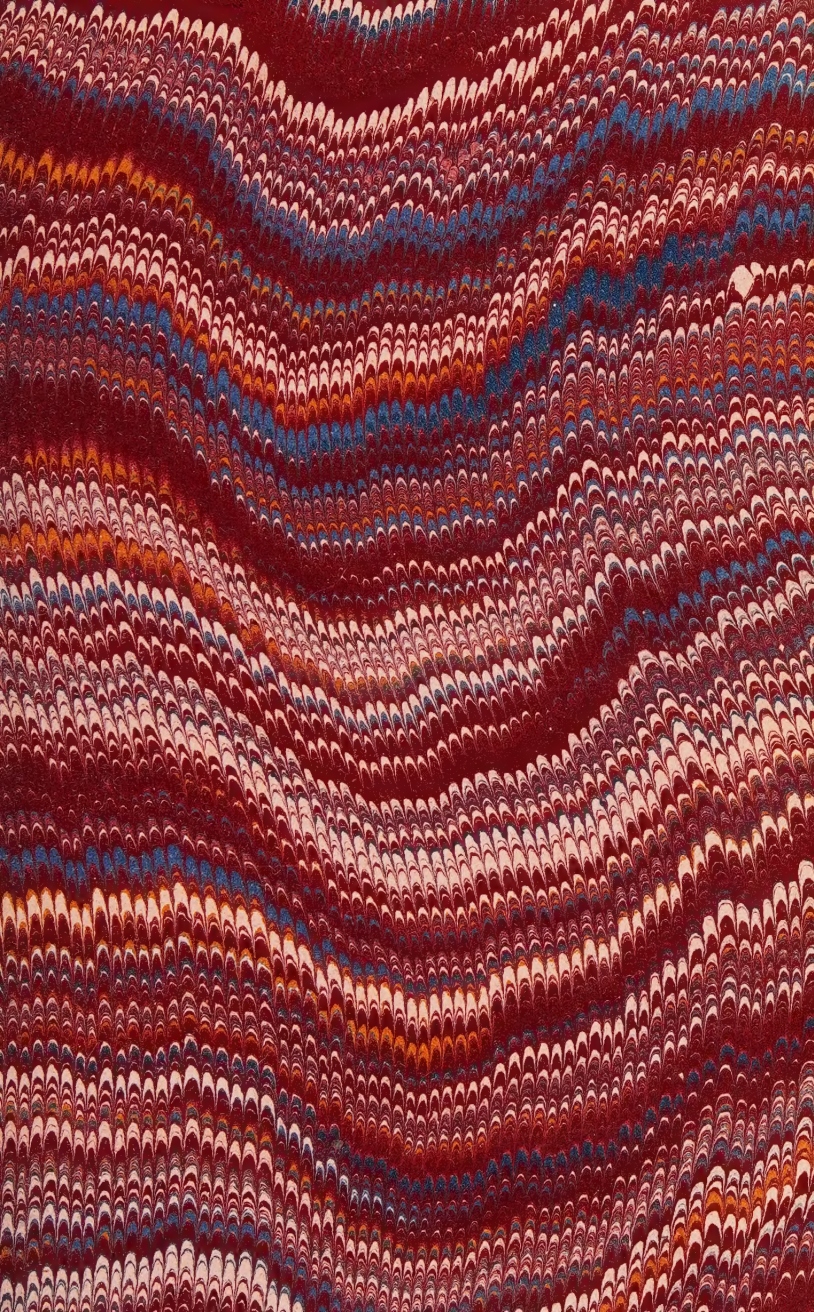
A Parisian Sultana



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GADDINGS WITH A PRIMITIVE PEOPLE,

By W. A. Baillie Grohman, Author of "Tyrol and the Tyrolese."

2 *Vols., Cloth,* 10/6.

"Mr. Baillie Grohman, apparently, is half German by blood, and he is certainly more than half Tyrolese by taste as well as domestication. He lives among the people and knows them intimately. He lies out among the hills for days together in pursuit of sport; he cooks his own very simple meals in solitary huts on the Alps and among the glaciers. He makes himself at home in the rude village inns or in the cottages of hospitable keepers and farmers. He attends their rifle matches attired in the local costume, and seems to talk the provincial *patois* fluently, being even a master of the rough and stinging 'chaff' which is the regular small change of conversation in those mountain valleys. And in the course of his 'Gaddings' he takes us to the shooting matches; to the Passion and Paradise plays; to the Confessional, Church ceremonies, and wedding festivities. We visit the *Sennhütten,* where solitary shepherdesses superintend the dairies and see to the flocks among the clouds and Alpine flower gardens, through the short summer season; and the peasant-baths, which are considered sovereign for the indigestion that must often wait upon voracious appetites. It is seldom indeed that a stranger of birth and education acquaints himself so thoroughly with those habits of the humbler classes in a most interesting country at which the mere tourist can only glance in passing. Mr. Grohman has done for the Tyrolese peasantry what Mr. Rose has done for the Spanish lower orders in his *Untrodden Spain.* Not the least romantic passage in his volumes is that where he tells how he became master of the Schloss Matzen, from which he dates his preface."

SATURDAY REVIEW.

"Mr. Baillie Grohman, to whom we are already indebted for an interesting and spirited description of Tyrol and the Tyrolese, has done well, in his present volumes, to seize upon some of the little known aspects of peasant life in the remoter villages, and to bring them vividly before us ere yet they have lost their peculiar charm. . . At the end of his book Mr. Grohman reverts for a short time to his favourite sport of chamois-hunting, of which he has before written so pleasantly; and as he tells us in his preface that many volumes would be required to do justice to all that is quaint and strange in the old-world nooks of Tyrol, we may perhaps hope at some future time for a few more of his characteristic pictures."

SPECTATOR.

"These two volumes give a series of sketches of life and manners among the Tyrolese peasantry. The pictures could hardly be better chosen or better drawn. The writer has not only a thorough knowledge of the world he describes, but the power, too, which is very commonly wanting in the authors of such books, of knowing what to take and what to leave. A pleasanter or more entertaining book we have not seen for a long while. It will refresh many happy recollections in the minds of those who know the world which Mr. Grohman describes, and will certainly, in the case of those who do not, go as far to supply the place of personal knowledge as any book can possibly do."

EXAMINER.

"Mr. Grohman's long residence in the Tyrol gives him a right to speak with authority of the people and of their ways. Some two years ago he published a very interesting volume entitled 'Tyrol and the Tyrolese,' which were in many respects so exhaustive and so full of detail that one may well feel surprised that he has found matter for this second work. . . But Mr. Grohman is so familiar with his subject, and he writes so well, that it would be almost impossible for him, on this subject, to be anything but interesting. . . Mr. Grohman's volumes have many bits of eloquent description, and his sketch of the Paradise Play of the Tyrol exhibits the most grotesque mixture of heathen, Roman, and modern ideas it is possible to conceive."

BRITISH QUARTERLY REVIEW.

"It is not often that a book has equal claims to the attention of the scientist and the general reader. Such, however, is the case with Mr. Grohman's 'Gaddings with a Primitive People.' Mr. Grohman has already produced one very valuable and readable work on the Tyrol and its people. The one now before us may be considered as a continuation of it. Mr. Grohman has lived many years in the Tyrol, and associated on terms of the most intimate familiarity with all classes of the population. Consequently his descriptions and observations may be accepted as authoritative, and many of them are exceedingly minute and curious. . . The book is brightly and pleasantly written."

SCOTSMAN.

"Very amusingly has Mr. Grohman sketched for us the series of quaint characters, and described the curious customs which are to be found in the remote districts of the Tyrolese Alps, with which he is so thoroughly acquainted. The village schoolmaster, the parish priest and his curate, the innkeeper, the mountain belle and her stalwart bridegroom, wedding ceremonies and wedding festivities, the Kirchtag and rifle match, the miracle plays and mountain bath-house all come in for lively notice, and combine to form a readable and chatty volume."

MORNING POST.

REMINGTON & Co., 5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.

A PARISIAN SULTANA:

A TRANSLATION OF

ADOLPHE BELOT'S

"La Sultane Parisienne."

BY

H. MAINWARING DUNSTAN.

VOL. I.

London:
REMINGTON AND CO.,
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1879.

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BOOK I.

THE PILGRIMS OF THE NILE.

A PARISIAN SULTANA.

CHAPTER I.

A CHARMING retreat, one of a luxurious suite of apartments in the Boulevard Malesherbes, the abode, evidently, of a woman both young and of elegant tastes. One glance round the room sufficed to establish the innate refinement of its owner—the couch covered with pearl-grey brocaded satin, the timepiece of Dresden china, the Venetian mirror, the crayons bearing the signature of Latour, the tasteful what-nots filled with miniature figures, the Smyrna carpet, the cushions adorned with antique lace, and the diminutive chairs, a modern creation, which the Parisians have invented to enable them, on the first approach of frost, to creep as closely as possible to the genial warmth of a winter fire—everything, in short, bore the impress of the owner's taste and refinement.

Nevertheless, however ardent might be the desire to meet the goddess of this charming sanctum, the sight of the various articles with which the furniture was laden could not fail to temper that eagerness, if indeed a decided chill did not result from the inspection. A feeling

of astonishment, at all events, would inevitably succeed, as, on a closer examination, the room, which at first sight appeared to be a boudoir, was seen to be equally suitable for the study of the most indefatigable of members of a modern Geographical Society.

As a matter of fact, the couch was lost to view, almost entirely, beneath a mass of books or pamphlets, published by Hachette, Arthur Bertrand, Delagrave and Lassailly, bearing some such titles as: "Au Cœur de l'Afrique," "l'Albert Nyanza," "le Fleuve Blanc," "Ismailia," "Les Grandes Entreprises Géographiques," &c.,&c. The corners of the room were littered with numbers of the "Annales des Voyages," and the slender frame of a gilded chair bent under the weight of Bouillet's famous "Atlas d'Histoire et de Géographie."

Even the satin-flock, with which the walls were covered, had not been respected, for, here and there, simply fastened by pins, appeared a map by Stieler of Gotha, another by Brué, a survey by Emile Lavasseur of the Institute, and sketches by Malte-Brun, Peterman and the Viscount de Bizemont, all of them explanatory or illustrative of the discoveries made by Burton, Speke, Grant, Livingstone and Dr. Cuny.

On a small ebony table, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and of exquisite design, was piled a perfect pyramid of the "Bulletin" of the Geographical Society, whose remaining numbers found a resting-place at the foot of the couch, on the Smyrna carpet. A view of the Albert Nyanza,

taken from the plans of Schweinfurth, the great German traveller, rested on the mantelpiece, between the time-piece and the mirror.

In the midst of all this furniture, which science had, as it were, taken by assault and alienated from its original destiny, amid the many seats which wore an air of astonishment at having been converted into book-shelves, one tiny chair alone remained unoccupied, doubtless reserved for the particular use of the master or mistress of the abode.

As the clock struck eight, a lady made her appearance in the room. She might be from three and twenty to twenty-five years of age, and her figure, albeit considerably above the average height, was admirably proportioned. Her small, shapely head was gracefully poised on a well-turned neck, and her drooping shoulders and full, though not too full, bust prepared the beholder for the tiny foot which peeped beneath a dress of some dark material —a foot, though small, yet firm and evidently accustomed to being used.

She is fair, decidedly fair, and still there is plenty of decision in the features. There is self-will and determination in the wide and somewhat square forehead, and in the straight nose, with its clear-cut nostrils; there is energy in the bluish-grey eyes, and the mouth, with its resolute outline and the upper lip slightly shaded with down, might well give utterance to soft nothings, but would be equally at home with a word of command. The whole counten-

ance is a strange mixture of good-nature and firmness, of amiability and resolution, of gaiety and sadness. She is a woman who has lived and suffered—that is evident, and yet, now and then, the innocent simplicity of her look, her child-like smile, and her movements would almost lead to the idea that she is but on the threshold of life. She might well be a widow who had not long been a wife.

She had scarcely entered her boudoir, when a servant brought her the *Times*. She tore off the cover without a moment's delay, looked carelessly over a column or two, and then, coming to a sudden stop, she went quickly over to a lamp which stood upon a round table, and ran her eye with great interest over the following lines, which she read to herself in English, without the necessity of even a mental translation into French :—

"The New York papers to hand to-day bring us lengthy details of the meeting between the great traveller, Livingstone, and the American, Henry Stanley. It is a well-known fact that whereas our Foreign Office contented itself with requesting its Consular Agents to furnish information as to the fate of our distinguished fellow countryman, reported to have died on the way from Zanzibar to Lake Tanganyika, the 'New York Herald' commissioned one of its correspondents to proceed to Southern Africa for the purpose of prosecuting an organised search after the missing explorer.

"Henry Stanley had spent two months in scouring the districts from which the latest news had been received from Livingstone, when, on arriving at Ujiji, he learnt that a white man, about 60 years of age, was living in that very part. Thereupon he redoubled his efforts, stirred up the enthusiasm of his escort, and, after much labour and fatigue, he found himself face to face with the man for whom England and the whole world were in mourning.

"'What were our first words?' writes Stanley. 'I declare I do not know. Mutual enquiries, no doubt, such as: What route did you take? Where have you been all this time? But I can neither remember his answers nor mine. I was too absorbed. I caught myself with my eyes fixed on this marvellous man, studying him, and learning him by heart. Every hair in his grey beard, each one of his wrinkles, the pallor of his countenance, his air of fatigue, mental and bodily—all told me what I had so longed wished to know. What evidence did these mute witnesses give? And of what absorbing interest was the study! At the same time I hung upon his words. His lips, those lips that never lied, gave me all sorts of details. He had so many things to say, that he began at the end, forgetting that he had to account for five or six years. But the tale gradually unfolded itself, ever increasing until it became a marvellous history.'

"Then," continued the *Times*, Livingstone began to question Stanley. 'What has been

going on in the world during these last six years? Nothing, I suppose. Old Europe is wiser than Africa, and her people know how to keep the peace. They do not swallow up each other, as do the unhappy tribes amongst whom I have lived so long.' 'Alas! you are mistaken, Doctor. Your wise Europe has just been bathed in the blood of a murderous strife. A million Germans have invaded France, fearful battles have been fought, and more than a hundred thousand men have perished. Paris, after undergoing a siege for six months, has been driven to surrender by famine.' He was silent for a long time, and then said, 'Has war only ravaged France and Prussia?' 'No, Spain has rebelled. Isabella has been driven from the throne; General Prim has been assassinated, and the civil war continues.' 'And science, has she not made any progress during these six years? Have you nothing to tell me of those grand triumphs of peace which alone honour a nation and give brilliancy to an age?' 'Yes, submarine cables have been laid, the Suez Canal has been completed, and the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean now join hands. A railway also unites the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.'

"The countenance of Livingstone grew bright.

"Stanley remained four months with Livingstone. They explored together the shores of the Tanganyika, and made fresh discoveries invaluable to science. After this expedition, the American Envoy was anxious to persuade his companion to return to Europe to recruit his

health, and see again his country, his family and his friends. 'No, no,' said Livingstone. 'My task is not ended. My friends, of whom you speak, want me to complete my work; my country expects a final effort from me, and even my daughter has courage enough to write: "However I may long to see you, I would rather you realised your projects in a way satisfactory to yourself, than that you should return simply to please me." Well said, my little girl!'

"Nothing would induce him. Ten years of discovery were not enough for him; he only dreamt of fresh explorations. Livingstone is not a traveller; he is a missionary, whom no amount of suffering can dishearten. This man, at times a miracle of boldness and energy, but always just and impartial, is adored by his small caravan of Arabs and blacks.

"Stanley, in consequence of Livingstone's energetic resistance, was obliged to depart alone, but all honour to him! He has nobly fulfilled his mission, he has taken his revenge on those who dared to doubt his veracity, and the *Times* thanks him in the name of England."

* * * * *

The paper which contained this article fell from the hands of the fair reader. Upstanding, with one elbow resting on the mantel-piece, and her head buried in her hands, she seemed to give herself up to reflection.

Suddenly, however, she made up her mind,

left her station at the mantel-piece, seated herself before a small writing-table, and wrote three letters, each couched in the same terms—

"My dear Sir,—

"If an evening spent with me and two others of your friends has not too many terrors for you, I shall be very pleased to give you a cup of tea at about nine o'clock to-morrow.

"With kind regards,

"Yours very truly,

"Laura de Guéran."

CHAPTER II.

The three individuals, to whom Madame de Guéran had written on the previous evening, were punctual in obeying her summons, and they were received by their hostess, not in the geographical boudoir which has already been described, but in a drawing-room furnished with equal luxury.

After tea, or at very nearly ten o'clock, the Baroness de Guéran, after having been for some time under the influence of very powerful emotion, suddenly roused herself, and, looking her guests full in the face, said—

"And so, gentlemen, you love me?"

Astonished at this very matter-of-fact plunge, and off their guard by reason of so utterly unforeseen an attack, neither of the three knew exactly which way to look, and when one of them, gifted with more hardihood than his companions, was on the point of speaking, Madame de Guéran motioned him to be silent, and went on herself to say—

"In saying that you love me, gentlemen, I am really only expressing my opinion that you are men of honour, incapable of harbouring the idea of marrying any woman for whom you do not entertain a sincere affection. Now, you

have, all three of you, proposed to me—none of you will deny that, I presume. You, M. de Morin," she continued, turning towards a tall young man of about thirty-five, whose mien and dress were alike irreproachable, "you have sent to me, in the capacity of ambassadress, your aunt, Madame de Genevray, whom I esteem highly. You, M. Périères, have written to me; and as for you, M. Desrioux, you have spoken outright. There cannot, therefore, be any doubt on the score of your proposals."

MM. de Morin, Périères and Desrioux, thus appealed to, after exchanging a triangular smile of amusement, bowed their assent, and Madame de Guéran resumed her address—

"I am deeply sensible, I can assure you, gentlemen, of the honour which you have done me. No protestations, pray! I am speaking in all seriousness, and I beg that I may be heard in the same spirit. I repeat, I am deeply grateful for the regard, at once respectful and affectionate, which you profess for me. But, if you will pardon me so far, I am at a loss to discover a sufficient reason for such a feeling. Why, you scarcely know me, even as an acquaintance."

Simultaneous protests rose to the lips of the trio, but the Baroness would not give them time to utter a word.

"I have a title," she continued, "and a fortune; I am a widow, and sufficiently well-connected to have the *entrée*, should I so wish, into the best society in Paris; I am barely five-and-

twenty years of age, and I am passably good-looking. That, gentlemen, sums up your knowledge of me, every atom of it. It has now become essential that you should know more, and I take it upon myself to enlighten you."

Having brought this exordium to a conclusion, she rose and approached the tea-table, once more to resume her duties as hostess. But, when the wants of her guests had been attended to, she again, still smiling in her own fascinating manner, resumed her seat on the sofa, and the thread of her discourse.

"My accent, be it ever so slight," she began, "will have told you before this that, if I speak your language as well as you do, I cannot claim your beloved Paris as my birth-place. Indeed, I am an Englishwoman, but I was educated by a French governess. I was married when I was twenty, and since then I have lived uninterruptedly in France. My father, after having passed half his life in exploring the remote parts of Africa, and after having recorded, in connection with them, much valuable information and deep research, one day, when no other course was open to him, made up his mind to betake himself to a quiet life in the bosom of his family. But he could never divest himself of his great interest in those questions which he had, for so long a time, made his study, and up to the day of his death he was one of the most valuable and valued members of the Royal Geograpical

Society of London. In our drawing-room at home—we lived in London—I have seen, from time to time, most of the celebrated travellers of our age. I remember distinctly having been nursed, when I was quite a little girl, by Overweg and Speke; and I have an equally vivid recollection of having been kissed by Richardson, on his departure for the Soudan, as well as of the tears I shed when we heard the report of his death, which we refused to credit until it received its sad confirmation from the lips of Barth. I knew Edward Vögel, who was treacherously murdered in the Waday territory, Schweinfurth, Baker, Brun-Rollet, and as many more, whose names I cannot recall at this moment, but whom I shall ever hold in remembrance. My father, cosmopolitan rather than English, held our insular prejudices in but slight esteem, and so it happened that, after dinner, instead of receiving a hint to retire, I was permitted to remain in the society of his friends. All the great scientific questions which have stirred the world during the last ten years, have been discussed in my presence by the men best qualified to elucidate them.

"Science, however, was not the unvarying topic of conversation. Slavery, that hideous plague-spot of Africa, and the slave-trade, which still continues in unimpaired activity, frequently occupied the attention, and roused the indignation of our guests. Even now I can call to mind the words of Livingstone one evening. 'Whilst we are sitting here, in ease

and pleasure, and surrounded with every comfort, long caravans of slaves are wending their toilsome way towards the markets of Khartoum, Zanzibar, and Timbuctoo. Yoked like oxen, or fastened to a long cord which drags them along in huddled groups, male and female, old and young, they plod along under that burning sun, naked, worn out with fatigue, dying by inches of hunger and thirst. And then, to think that these poor creatures are only an infinitesimal fraction of the victims of the slave-trade! In the man-hunts organised in those accursed countries, thousands die of their wounds or find a last resting-place in the woods whither they have fled for concealment. Yes—corpses and skeletons are the landmarks in the way of the desert.'

"Trembling with indignation I used to drink in every word of these conversations, and I could not but admire, from the very depth of my soul, those men, who, free to live a life of wealth and honour in their own land, yet chose to pass their existence in deadly climes, facing all dangers, bearing every ill, that they might lend a helping hand to the progress of science, and interest the world in the sacred cause of the victims of oppression."

Here Madame de Guéran paused to sip her tea, whilst her hearers, completely under the charm of her winning eloquence and moving tones, kept an almost religious silence. They were learning, and for the first time, to know her. Living in the world of Paris, they had

recognised in her a woman distinguished for her intelligence, her beauty, and her manner, and they had fallen in love with her, attracted by the refinement of her features, the grace of her smile, and the vivacity of her wit. But now, all suddenly, that countenance was resplendent with a novel brilliancy, those eyes shone with renewed light, the mind unfolded itself with unexpected rapidity, and the heart was beating with a sympathy which made itself felt.

"It will scarcely astonish you," resumed the Baroness, in a calmer voice, "to learn that I, brought up, as I have been, amongst the men whom I have mentioned to you, have become a sharer both in their ideas and their enthusiasm. Neither will it surprise you, I am sure, that I should have given my love to one of my father's most frequent guests. The Baron de Guéran was a Frenchman, and was descended from that fearless René Caillet, the first European who attempted the perilous journey from Sierra-Leone to Tangier, and, it may be, effected an entrance into Timbuctoo. Although he had not reached his thirtieth year when I saw him for the first time, M. de Guéran had already journeyed in central Africa, and had there made some important discoveries. If his name is not familiar to you as a geographer or an explorer, it is simply because he would not publish any of his notes until all were complete. Alas! he has not been able to finish his work.

"My father raised many objections to my

union with the Baron. As a colleague, he both loved and esteemed him—as a son-in-law he had his doubts. So soon as I had to enter into his calculations, his admiration for travels and travellers cooled down considerably. He was never tired of saying to me—'Take care; the love of remote exploration and discovery—I speak from experience—absorbs all other love, and would make the best of men utterly oblivious of his family duties. Be not too confident; your husband, whilst adoring you, may still accustom himself to worship you from a distance. You will be proud to belong to him, but you will rarely be happy at his side, for your life will wear away in fear and apprehension.' And then I would reply—'Have no fear; I will answer for M. de Guéran.' 'What? You imagine that he will sacrifice all his ideas for your sake, and will live ever by your side?' 'Nothing of the sort, my dear father; I should not wish it for a moment, but I will go with him. I am determined to share all his dangers, and I will say to him, as our friend Lady Baker did to her husband—whither thou goest I will go; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried.'

"However, he had to give way and consent to the marriage, and I came to reside in Paris with M. de Guéran. For two years the fears of my father appeared groundless; the Baron did not seem to be troubled with any desire to travel. He wandered in Elysian fields only,

and I was only too happy in wandering there with him. The awakening was terrible. 'I am off to Africa,' said he to me one day. For two years I had forgotten Africa, the slave-trade, slavery, science, everything but love. And you might well suppose that, starting up thus suddenly, as it were, out of my sleep, I called to mind, and whispered in the ear of my husband Lady Baker's, or, to speak more correctly, Ruth's touching words. Nothing of the kind! Thenceforth, I had but one thought—and that was to preserve my mode of life unaltered, not to risk my happiness in any one way, to leave nothing to chance or contingency. I devoted all my energy to the task of trying to persuade M. de Guéran that the tribes of Africa had no claim whatsoever on him, that the Geographical Society could well dispense with any information from him, and that science would still march onward without his aid. My efforts were unavailing, and I failed to convince him, so that, taking advantage of my absence in England on a visit, he rushed off to Marseilles, and embarked without even letting me know the exact destination of his fresh expedition. 'You would be wanting to follow me,' he wrote. 'I cannot take advantage of your devotion; but, take courage, my absence will be of but short duration.' At first, I waited, for where was I to go? And I always hoped that he would not delay his return, but would keep his promise to me. Tired of waiting, at last I made up my mind to start, when the French Consul,

at Cairo, sent me word that the Baron de Guéran was dead.

"Such has been my life. Gentlemen, you know me now, and, doubtless, you have come to the conclusion that I have devoted too much time to myself. Let me relieve your minds by telling you that, what more I have to say refers solely to you. Let me give you all another cup of tea, and then I will commence my peroration."

CHAPTER III.

"And now, gentlemen," resumed the Baroness, after a momentary pause, and in a tone of great vivacity, "you are fully informed, as far as I am concerned. You have a thorough knowledge of the antecedents of the defendant, but you are apparently undismayed, and you continue to prefer your suit. Be it so! Then do not complain, if, after exposing myself, I expose you in turn."

The three aspirants made a simultaneous effort to interrupt her.

"One moment, please," said she quickly, "I ask for no confessions from you, seeing that they would be superfluous. For the last six months I have been gaining information about you, I have been studying you, and now I know you. That sounds flattering, does it not? Do not let yourselves be prematurely inflated with pride, for you are very, very far from divining either the thought which has actuated me, or the object of my inquiries. First of all I will consider you generally, in the aggregate, if you prefer it. You are, each of you, from thirty to thirty-five years of age, the best age for marriage; on that point I profess myself satisfied. You are neither," continued she laughing,

"too prepossessing nor too plain; you can all of you boast that golden mien, as far as appearances are concerned, which every sensible woman would desire in the man whom she intends to acknowledge as her lord. Each of you is in the enjoyment of a fortune sufficiently large to secure independence, and to divest marriage with a rich woman of even a suspicion of mercenary motives. You have your faults, no doubt; who, indeed, has not? But those persons from whom I have gained my information assure me that you have no vices, and that is sufficient for me. Moreover, during the siege of Paris, which in some degree was a standard by which to test the men of our time, you all of you bore yourselves as good men and true. Lastly, you have shown yourselves, capable of creating occupations for yourselves and you have the great merit, which I gladly acknowledge, of being neither idlers nor useless members of society. I have thus, as I promised, described you generally, and now I will sum you up individually.

"You, M. de Morin," continued the Baroness, addressing the one who was seated nearest to her, "you are one of our most notable draughtsmen. I know the greater part of your works, and I appreciate them, both from an artistic point of view, and as a woman who has a certain object in view. But the moment has not come to unfold that object, so you must perforce exercise your patience a little longer. You are, moreover, daring to a degree; that is

to say, no adventure, however perilous, would cause you to recoil. You have an intuitive genius, and are formed for attack; a shrewd commander would appoint you to the Zouaves. I shall post you—but we will discuss that later on. Take your place in the ranks, Mr. Zouave, and I will pass on to No 2."

The young aspirant, who was seated next to M. de Morin, at once made ready for the inspection, for he stood up, saluted his hostess after the military fashion, and sat down again.

Madame de Guéran smilingly continued—

"You, M. Périères, are to be congratulated on the articles which have appeared in the *Revue de France*. Your ideas are good, your reflections often profound, and you put your thoughts into language both elegant and concise. In the field you would be admirably adapted for writing despatches, without, however, precluding you from taking your part in the campaign as a combatant. You would scarcely advance without an order, but once committed to the fray you would bear yourself as bravely as would M. de Morin. You are gazetted to an infantry regiment, and so I dispose of your case."

The third aspirant, with whom alone Madame de Guéran had now to deal, was a man of about thirty, fair, of medium height, with a rather sad expression, and whose clothes, of a serious cut, made him look somewhat older than he really was.

"My dear M. Desrioux," said the Baroness

to him, "in my eyes you possess a rare merit, very rare, indeed, amongst men of your means; that of having adopted the medical profession, a profession which binds you down to a course of severe study, and condemns you to a continuous slavery. Accept my sincere congratulations, and if I do not, as I have done in the case of these other gentlemen, post you to any particular branch of the service, it is not that I doubt your courage, but that a military surgeon, a *rôle* for which you are admirably adapted, cannot be considered as belonging to any special arm, or, I might almost say, to any nationality, for he hastens to the succour of all who call upon him, be they friends or foes, wheresoever they may be. You may, therefore, resume your own position, my dear doctor, and consider your case disposed of."

Then turning once more to all three, she continued with all the charm of manner which was so natural to her—

"You cannot accuse me of having been too hard upon you or ill-treated you in any way. Indeed, I have dwelt upon your merits alone, and any one hearing me might place you all in the calendar as minor saints. But I will be quite open with you. I have spoken well of you because I have nothing to say against you. It is not by accident that you meet here to-night in my house, or that, during the past six months you have been admitted by degrees to intimacy with me—it is solely because I so

willed it. In view of certain projects, of which I am about to apprise you, I have chosen you out of all my acquaintances, and, as I believe, I have chosen well."

Her hearers bowed in silence, and she resumed—

"Alas! It is your very good qualities which puzzle me. They are varied, but each one of you has an equal share. How then, without being inexcusably unjust, can I choose between you? In a state of embarrassment, similar to that of the shepherd, Paris, of old, I know not on whom to bestow the apple. If one of you had only made himself famous by some conspicuous action, my mind would be more at ease, but, situated as you are in this civilized Paris of ours, and so long as the country is at peace, what test can I impose upon you, or what proof can you offer me? As matters stand, you are simply men of the world, whose first duty is to be as little conspicuous as possible. I, therefore, have nothing to expect, nothing which could put an end to my hesitation. You see, do you not, that I am approaching—no, not yet? Well, at last I am coming to the root of the matter, without further circumlocution or beating about the bush. The daughter, the wife, the friend of the famous explorers of our age comes once more upon the scene.

"I have made up my mind definitively to traverse Africa, not that portion which all the world knows, and which commences at Alexandria and finishes at the desert; but the

desert itself, and those strange territories which are to be found by those who have the courage to cross it. The longing, nay, I may say, the necessity which has taken possession of me, and impels me to see for myself these imperfectly explored regions—to what can I attribute it? To the education I have received, to the conversations to which I have listened, and the circle in which I have lived? Or, is it not rather that I am obeying an impulse which attracts me towards the spot where M. de Guéran perished? Does not this contemplated journey seem almost like a 'pilgrimage?' I cannot explain it, and, after all, it is of but slight importance as far as you are concerned. What really does concern you, gentlemen, is, that for some time past I have thought of you as my companions. Yes, it would be impossible for me alone to conquer the difficulties and encounter the dangers which I foresee. As for surrounding myself with hired attendants or companions, I should never dream of any such thing. They would only desert me half-way. No! courage and devotion are not to be bought. With you it is different. I have been brought in contact with you, I have watched you narrowly, and I have come to the conclusion that you are the only persons who are capable of aiding me in the accomplishment of my self-imposed task.

"In you I possess the man of literary accomplishments, who will record our impressions, the painter whose pencil will immortalize the scenes through which we pass, and the doctor and

savant combined, who, whilst assuaging our sufferings, and the sufferings of those with whom we may meet, will labour, hand-in-hand with us, in the interests of science. If I mistake not, and I know you too well to be mistaken, I shall find in you, above all, three champions, three friends, three brothers, and to your loyalty and your honour I would confide, without one single qualm, my reputation and my life."

She was entirely carried away by her feelings, and without paying any attention to her guests, who had in turn and in silence warmly pressed her hand, she resumed—

"And what shall I give you in exchange for the immense sacrifice I am calling upon you to make, for the almost sublime devotion to which I lay claim? My unending friendship to two of you; my love, perhaps, to the third, and who will that third one be? I know not. At this moment I assure you that I know not; you have each an equal chance. If, on our journey, one of you should succeed in gaining my heart, I will make no sign, lest by so doing I should rouse the jealousy of the other two. Not until we return will I proclaim the name of the conqueror. Either of you gentlemen may achieve this conquest; it depends on yourselves alone. In the regions where we shall spend our days, you will find ample field for exploits of all descriptions, and he who shall prove himself richest in good and brave actions, shall be rewarded by me. Thus he will have deserved the hand I cannot, with any show of reason, bestow

upon him to-day. For my part, too, I shall have every cause to love him and for ever.

"And now you know all I had to say to you; now you know why you have met here to-day. Whatever may be your decision, I trust that my too lengthy address will not lead to your passing an unfavourable judgment upon me. My education has been peculiar, carried on in the midst of people who had studied so many diverse manners and customs, that their minds had become confused, and well-nigh incapable of distinguishing between the usages tolerated in Europe and the habits in vogue amongst savages. I carry this eccentricity to the extent of wishing to make my own choice of a husband, and putting him to the proof. I am wayward, if you will; obstinate, hard upon others as well as upon myself, greedy of sensation, an ardent seeker after adventure. I am guilty, too, of making strange propositions to my friends—on that count you can give evidence; but I do not insist on an immediate answer. I allow them time to reflect. In eight days you will have had leisure enough to weigh all the *pros* and *cons*, and come to a decision, and I will ask you to meet me then, in this same room, at the same hour. If you accompany me, I shall be very pleased indeed; if you do not, none the less shall I set out on my journey, and I shall remain a widow. And now, gentlemen, it is late, so good-night."

CHAPTER IV.

Eight days after this interview, and exactly an hour before the time named by Madame de Guéran for her second interview with MM. de Morin, Périères and Desrioux, she was informed that the last named individual wished to speak to her. Accordingly she joined him in the drawing-room.

"If you are before your time," she cried, as she went quickly towards him, "it is because you bring me bad news. You have decided, I suppose, upon not accompanying me?"

"No," was the reply, "I have not yet come to any decision on the subject. My object in coming to you is to lay my position frankly before you, and then ask your advice."

"I know your position," said she. "You are a doctor, and, as I feared, you are loth to give up your practice."

"But I have no practice to give up, so to speak, seeing that my private income enables me to devote my whole time to the poor. They do not come to me; I go in search of them."

"Surely the charitable organisations of Paris cannot be suffering from any lack of doctors," was the reply of Madame de Guéran, "and they may very well dispense with your services."

"I have no connection with any establish-

ment whatever," answered M. Desrioux, "and I have nothing to do with what are called the 'official' poor. But just as there are proud paupers, so are there in Paris many sick persons who shrink from soliciting medical attendance, and would rather die than apply to the district establishments for relief. These are the unfortunates I seek, and when I find them I do my best to cure them."

"Do sickness and disease, then, exist only in Paris?" exclaimed Madame de Guéran. "Shall we not find them in those regions which I ask you to traverse with me? I looked upon you as the most useful of my travelling companions, not merely for the attention you would have lavished upon us in those territories where the strongest have to succumb to fever, but more especially for the numerous cures you would have wrought amongst those tribes abandoned or disowned by science. They whom you succour here are worthy of your interest, I admit, but are they not also, to a certain extent, the victims of false pride and their own improvidence? When a sick child belonging to them, for instance, is day by day wasting away, they take no notice of it—they wait for you to come to them. You are right to go, undoubtedly, but in the countries which I purpose visiting there are both suffering and death, and if the doctor is not called in, it is simply because medicine is unknown. Have you not, therefore, a mission to fulfil in the midst of these ignorant tribes, as well as by the bedsides of your poor?"

"It is not alone a question of my poor," said M. Desrioux, sadly.

Too astonished to speak, she was regarding him with a questioning air when, suddenly, he went to her side, and, seizing her hands before she could prevent him, exclaimed—

"Do not let anything I am about to say wound you. If I do love you, my respect for you is as thorough as my love. Eight days ago, after having listened to you almost with veneration, I left this house enraptured, carried away by enthusiasm. And was it to be wondered at? You summoned me to live your life for months, perhaps for years; you desired that I should share your joys and your sorrows, should protect you, defend you, minister to you! You gave me permission to adore you every hour of my life—and that—that to me was light, and warmth, and happiness, aye, life itself! Ah! if you but knew how I love you! For pity's sake let me speak, I beseech you, for I may, perhaps, never see you more! I have not lived the life of those about me—I have always worked and struggled—study and science have been my only love. I met you, and science 'paled her ineffectual fire.' From that moment I had but one single thought—to see you again, to be close to you, to be something in your life. The dismal garrets visited by me each morning looked bright and cheerful from the hope that I might see you ere night. And then, the ecstasy of the thought that, by your own free will, I was not to leave you! Nay, more than that, you held before my

eyes the gleaming hope that one day, perhaps—Ah, that was more than hope, it was certainty! Yes, yes! I know it, I feel it—I should have triumphed—I should have deserved you, in that I love you best!"

The first impulse of Madame de Guéran, when these impassioned words fell upon her ears, was to stem the torrent, but she had not the courage to interrupt the speaker, and, besides, to astonishment succeeded a conflict of emotions. What! was it this man, so calm, apparently, and so reserved, who spoke thus eloquently, and with such fervour expressed his ardent love? Had she, then, succeeded in imbuing with so burning a passion this man, held by all to be old before his time? Was she so wildly loved by this staid being, who was supposed to hold the very name of love in contempt?

Suddenly she raised her eyes, till now lowered beneath his impassioned gaze, and, looking him full in the face, she said—

"If, indeed, you feel all you say, why cannot you accompany me?"

"I cannot go with you," was the reply, "because I have a mother, aged and feeble, who has no one but me in this world, and who will die if I leave her. Ah! but for her, nothing would have kept me back. You would then have had no need to tell me that those who suffer here could well do without my care; that other men, as disinterested as I, as devoted, as skilful, would care for them, cure them, save

them. In the regions whither you asked me to go with you, there are the halt, the maimed, and the sick, lacking the blessings of science. I would have unfolded to them her secrets, I would have attempted cures to them impossible. With you at my side, I feel that I should have accomplished great deeds—Ah! how truly you divined, the other day, with subtle flattery, my tastes, my instincts, my aspirations! The life of a missionary has ever had a charm for me. To make civilisation, charity, the good, and the beautiful, a reality in those countries which do not even know them by name, to drive out before me barbarism, to bind up the wounded, to heal the sick, to cheer the broken-hearted, to open all hearts to the influence of love—that would indeed be a mission of glory!"

He was no longer the same man; his voice was impassioned and full of feeling, his every gesture eloquent. His eye glistened, his very countenance seemed illumined. The metamorphosis we noticed in Madame de Guéran at the former interview, when she was carried away by her subject, was reproduced in him.

He stopped for a moment, and then, in a calmer tone, resumed—

"But side by side with these ennobling tasks, these holy missions, there are others, less prominent, which cannot, ought not to be overlooked. By her only child, her sole support, her one hope, a mother must always be the most fondly-loved of all created beings. I was all the world to mine, as she was to me, in the time when I

yet knew you not. She would let me go were I to say that I was going with you and for you —a mother is ever ready for any sacrifice. She knows you, for I have poured out my heart, so full of you, to her. She might even push her self-denial to the extreme of urging upon me this long voyage. But, away from her, I should always have her before my eyes, weeping, anxious, despairing, growing weaker and weaker, and, perhaps, dying. I could not bear the thought of her dying when I was far away from her, unable to close her eyes, to hear her latest wish, to receive her parting sigh, to wrap her in her shroud, and scatter flowers on her resting-place! The agony of a mother in such a case would indeed be terrible; I have no right to leave her, I must remain. It is the duty, perhaps the first, of a son to be beside the death-bed of her who has given him life."

He stopped, and as she took his hand in hers she said—

"You are right. You ought not to leave her, and I would not have you go."

"I knew full well that you would tell me so," said he, with tears in his eyes, "but, you will leave me, and with them! Ah," he exclaimed, quickly, "if you could only give up the idea of this journey!"

"I have no more right to give it up than you have to leave your mother," was the reply. "You would be present during the last moments of your mother. Recollect that I was not present at those of my husband. I know from strangers

that he is dead, but I do not even know the spot where he died, the victim of a dastardly outrage. I shrank, the other evening, from dwelling upon this subject. To you alone I will confess that, before I can think of putting off these widow's weeds, before I can dream of beginning a new life, I must see with my own eyes the spot which witnessed the dying agony of M. de Guéran. I want to learn the details of his last moments, to recover his papers, to publish his studies, his works, and before surrendering his name, if, indeed, I do surrender it, to make it famous. You see, my friend," she continued, softly, "that if you have a duty to perform here, I have one equally binding there beyond. Every one has his work in this world. I respect that which has fallen to your lot, and I ask you to respect mine."

He bowed his assent at once, but, after a moment's pause, he could not help saying—

"Are you not setting before yourself a task beyond your strength? A woman of your age, brought up as you have been, and accustomed to luxury, to venture into such countries in the midst of such inhabitants?"

"I should not be the first woman who has visited them—Mrs. Livingstone, for instance—"

"Do not speak of her. In three days she succumbed to fever on the banks of the Zambesi."

"I do not dispute it. But Lady Baker never left her husband, and Ida Pfeiffer twice travelled round the world. And have you no recollection

of that charming young girl, the Countess Alexina Tinne, who, though scarcely twenty-three, had traversed the whole of Eastern Africa?"

"Ah!" said he, "do not cite her example. She is dead, as you know, a victim to Arabian butchery."

"Well," she replied, without a tremor in her voice, "if God so wills it, I will die as she did. I have often thought of her glorious death, and it has no terrors for me."

Hopeless of convincing her, he asked at last—

"When do you set out?"

"That I shall decide this very evening."

"With these other gentlemen?"

"Yes," she replied, casting down her eyes.

He moved impatiently, with a gesture of repugnance. But, with an effort he recovered himself, and said calmly—

"I leave you with them, but shall I not see you again?"

"Every day, if you wish, until my departure. It cannot take place at once, as I have many preparations to make."

"And will you let me have news of you when you are away?"

"Certainly. But you know that the opportunities of sending letters are few and far between."

"Unfortunately, that is so," said he. "May I write to you?" he added.

"I beg you will. Your letters will seem to me fragrant of home."

The bell rang.

"Here are they whom you await," said M. Desrioux. "Happier than I, they come, doubtless, to say that they will accompany you. I prefer not meeting them, so pray let me escape by this other door."

"Go, then," she said, sadly, as she held out her hand in token of farewell.

CHAPTER V.

MM. DE MORIN and Périères were evidently in the best of humours when Madame de Guéran joined them, and, as had been foreseen by Dr. Desrioux, they were the bearers of good news for their fair hostess. Nevertheless, she looked at them anxiously and inquiringly, as she said—

"Well?"

"We go with you," was the joint reply.

"Could you doubt it?" added the painter. "There was no need to give me a week to reflect. The morning after you imparted your project to us, I made up my mind to follow you to the end of the world, if you wished it."

"As for me," chimed in M. Périères, by way of stealing a march on his rival, "my resolution was taken before you had finished speaking."

"I thank you both, gentlemen," said the Baroness, "but let us be serious, please. This is not a question as to which of you will set out with the greater haste. Still less is it a question of following me, for we all go together, each on a precisely similar footing, as loyal comrades and true. From to-day you will have the goodness to treat me as one of yourselves, and spare me even an approach to any vapid compliments.

I have already told you that we will settle our accounts on our return to France. In the meantime, it must be thoroughly understood that any display, in any way whatsoever, of the feelings with which I inspire you is absolutely and expressly forbidden. Unless I take these precautions against you our journey may become—" and then she added with a smile, "dangerous. And now that we understand each other, let us to work, that is to say, let us arrange the preliminaries of the expedition."

"Quite so. Quite so!" cried M. de Morin. "We have not a moment to lose, for we shall set out at once, shall we not? In a fortnight at the latest?"

"And why not at the end of this week?" asked his companion.

"Not so fast, gentlemen, not so fast," said the Baroness. "Voyages of exploration, and quests such as that which we contemplate, are not to be matured in a moment. I can, it is true, spare you certain delays, seeing that, in anticipation of what has occurred to-day, I took my precautions six months ago; but, notwithstanding all that, we have still much to do in the way of preparation."

"You have only to issue your commands," exclaimed M. de Morin. "As for me, I thought that I had only to say good-bye to my friends, pack my portmanteau, and provide myself with plenty of money."

"Well, you have only made three mistakes, my dear sir. Say good-bye, if you like, but at

the same time make your will, and leave it with your lawyer, who, by-the-way, may soon have to open it. I do not want to damp your ardour, but you, apparently, look upon this voyage as a pleasure trip, and I must undeceive you. Neither is it a question of one portmanteau, but of many, and they must be packed as I direct."

"There you surprise me," remarked M. Périères, "for I always understood that in countries where railways are unknown, the less luggage the better."

"Instead of railways we shall have to put up with boats, bearers, and camels. As for money, it has not, in most African territories, the value which we give it. All sorts of cloth goods, glass beads, brass wire, copper rings, sometimes even shells, called *kourdi* or *koungouna*, but generally cowries, are far more appreciated as current coin than gold would be. All these things have their market prices, just as a bank note or a railway share has in France. So, you see that, up to the very moment of our departure, a great portion of your time will have to be given up to important purchases. All this business, of course, you will transact on behalf of our community; and, whilst on this subject, had we not better elect a cashier?"

"Certainly," replied M. de Morin, "let us choose a cashier, or rather, will you appoint one of us to the post, for I hope you will not object to our raising you to the dignity of commander-in-chief of the expedition?"

"I accept the post, gentlemen, and I trust that I shall prove myself worthy of the confidence which you repose in me. In immediate virtue of my office, then, I appoint M. Périères to be our cashier, and I also direct him, after our purchases are made, to arrange for the despatch of all our baggage to Cairo, where we will meet it."

"Oh!" said the new cashier, "then we are going to attack Africa from the Egyptian side. And here have I been devoting myself for the last eight days to the study of Tripoli, Tunis, St. Louis, Sierra-Leone, Zanzibar—in short, all the customary points of departure for such expeditions."

"Then you had better devote yourself now to Egypt, which leads to Nubia, the first region we have to traverse."

"Nubia?" exclaimed M. de Morin. "It has ever been one of my dreams! And afterwards?"

"I am not quite sure about the afterwards."

"Charming! Charming! We do not know where we are going. I have always longed for an expedition of that sort."

"You forget, perhaps," said she, gravely, "that the end of it may be death."

"Better still! To be buried in Nubia, instead of that commonplace Père-la-Chaise! My happiness is complete!"

The Baroness could not help laughing, for this genuine gaiety disarmed her.

As for M. Périères, who, not content with his

appointment as cashier, had also constituted himself Historian to the Expedition, he was incessantly making notes, and, as he wrote, kept murmuring to himself disjointed phrases such as—"Cloth," "Brass-wire," "Cairo," "Nubia," "We are buried in the desert."

"May I ask whether you are already practising the African dialect?" said M. de Morin, in astonishment at this telegraphic style of speech.

"Yes," said the man of letters, "I am getting into some of their ways."

"Then the sooner you get out of them the better," said Madame de Guéran. "These African tribes are not what we conceited Europeans often take them for. Their languages are very beautiful, and they have no *patois*. I beg of you not to give credence to all the absurdities which have been uttered on these subjects. You will meet with a number of very intelligent tribes. They are merely behind the age; and Livingstone, who had studied them thoroughly, stated once in my presence that Europe, a century ago, was not one whit more enlightened than the Africa of the present day, But let us turn our attention once more to the preparations for our departure. You must provide the best possible arms, on the most approved principles, but perfectly plain. Amongst certain of the tribes it is imprudent to go about with too highly-finished and elaborate weapons, for they merely serve to excite the cupidity of some Chief, who, in order to possess himself of them, will not shrink from assassination. You

must also lay in a stock of second-hand pistols, revolvers, carbines, swords, sabres, and such like things, to be offered to those Chiefs whose good-will we wish to secure."

"An arsenal, upon my word—a regular arsenal!" exclaimed M. de Morin.

"Yes, in certain parts of central Africa you can only get on by taking a gift in your hand."

"Their idea of direct taxation, I presume?"

"Just so. And now you may consider yourselves armed offensively and diplomatically, but you have still to furnish yourselves with safe conducts and letters of recommendation, which must be obtained from the foreign consulates, the Viceroy of Egypt, his Ministers, his Pashas, and, in fact, from every quarter representing any authority in the Turkish dominions. For my part, I will obtain some very valuable letters, as my friends have left in Africa remembrances of themselves, upon which it may be useful for us to call. I think I have told you everything, and, at all events, our conversation will have enlightened you on many points. If we do not waste any time, we may possibly be ready in a few weeks. Employ them, over and above the preparations we have arranged, in taking long walks and rides, in practising your shooting, and in studying Arabic. I mean the ordinary Arabic, which is spoken throughout one half of Asia and Africa. I will complete your education *en route*."

"But the medical man of the expedition,"

asked M. de Morin, "where is he? Has he declined to accompany us?"

"Yes, he has just told me so."

"Really? That dear doctor!" said the painter, rubbing his hands.

"That excellent doctor!" echoed the historian, patting his memorandum book with an air of relief.

"Are you no more concerned than that?" asked Madame de Guéran.

"Concerned!" exclaimed M. de Morin.

"On the contrary," continued M. Périères, keeping the ball rolling, "we are delighted!"

"Why so?"

"Because the number of aspirants to your hand, Baroness, is lessened thereby. We are now only two, and our chances are better by one-third."

"That is true!" said she, laughing. "I never thought of that. But do you think that we can manage without a doctor?"

"Perfectly, my dear madam—perfectly. We shall never be ill."

"It is very evident that you do not know Africa. However, I agree to all. We shall never be wounded; fever will treat us with every respect, and we shall be in better health than if we were in Paris. But you are too young for me to make this trip alone with you."

"Desrioux is no older," said M. de Morin.

"But his character is more staid."

"Oh!" exclaimed M. Périères, "do not say that. What need have we to be serious? Do

not reproach us for our gaiety and enthusiasm; they will serve to help us all to pass the time pleasantly out yonder. The originality of this expedition appeals directly to our peculiarities. We shall take with us into the very heart of the most uncivilized regions of Africa the true Parisan element. Apart, we should soon lose our spirits and our worldly ways and manners; but together, each with his eye on the other, and both desirous of amusing you, de Morin and I will continue still to be true men about town. In crossing the desert we shall do our best to suppose ourselves going from the Chaussée d'Antin to the cross-roads in the Champs Elysées, and we shall intentionally jumble up the great lakes of Southern Africa with the Auteuil pond. Please do not try to damp our spirits, or make us melancholy. If you did, you would never succeed, happily for us and for you."

"There is a great deal of truth in what you say," replied Madame de Guéran, "but, all the same, I must have a companion rather more venerable than you two are."

"Very well," said M. de Morin, "then we must go and find out some good-natured old soul."

"He must be a doctor. Don't forget that."

"I quite understand. One of your really respectable old family practitioners."

"Not a bit of it! He would never be able to keep up with us; we should leave him on the road. He must not be more than forty or forty-five years of age."

"We shall never find one of that sort," interrupted M. Périères. "At that age a doctor is in the zenith of his practice, if he is worth anything, and if he is not, it would not be prudent in us to take him, because, instead of being put to death by the Aborigines, we should perish at his hands. There would be no poetry about that."

"I have hit upon a plan to meet every difficulty," suddenly exclaimed M. de Morin, who, for the last few moments, had evidently been following out some idea of his own. "I have him—just the man for us, not yet forty, a perfect gentleman, and a clever fellow who would have had a splendid practice if—"

"If what?" was the exclamation.

"If he did not gamble as if all the gambling in the world was concentrated in his own proper person. Does that alarm you, Baroness?"

"It would alarm me for you, if you are to be bound to lose your money to this gentleman."

"I am quite easy on that score, because I always win from him. I have put him under a spell."

"Well, then, in that case he will only be dangerous to the tribes of Africa. But how can you possibly hope to induce him to accompany us?"

"That is my secret, and, with all due deference, I must decline to disclose it just yet. In the mean time, I can only say that everything leads me to believe that by to-morrow we shall have replaced M. Desrioux."

"Wait one moment," M. Périères called out hurriedly. "It is, I presume, quite understood that M. Desrioux is to be replaced only in his capacity as our doctor, and not as an aspirant —a candidate—an intended—"

"Make your minds quite easy, gentlemen," replied Madame de Guéran, "I will never marry a gambler. The new-comer is without the pale of our compact."

"Under that gratifying understanding, Baroness, we will take our leave for the present, and will call to-morrow for fresh orders."

CHAPTER VI.

MM. Périères and de Morin lighted their cigars as they descended the stairs, and then walked arm in arm down the Boulevard Malesherbes, on their way to the Chaussée D'Antin.

Destined, by virtue of their engagement with Madame de Guéran, to live together for a long time, they were doing their best to forget their rivalry, and to think only of the great adventure they were about to attempt. Though, in the presence of the Baroness, they had thought it right to assume utter indifference to the dangers which menaced them, and on which, lest they should ignore them, she laid such stress, yet, when they found themselves by themselves, they did not in the least underrate the serious nature of the undertaking.

They knew, well enough, how noxious the interior of Africa is to Europeans, and that, out of every ten explorers, three or four at the outside live to see their native land again, where even they often succumb to the *sequelæ* of maladies contracted in that deadly climate. They called to mind the fate of Richardson and of young Overweg, barely thirty, who both died, worn out by fever, on the borders of Bornou ; of Vögel, who was assassinated by order of the

Prince of the Waday territory; of Vaudey, the uncle of the brothers Poncet, who was killed at Gondokoro; of Brun-Rouet, Steudner, and Lesaint, who died from sickness and overwork; of Mdlle. Tinne, her mother, and her aunt, the Baroness Van Capellen, and many others whose names serve to swell the sadly long obituary of African travellers. They knew, too, that these pioneers of civilization, these grand missionaries, had, before death released them, experienced human suffering to its fullest extent. But they were young, brave, hardy, trusting to luck, anxious to see everything they could, eager to learn, and, above all, in love. And it was not to be wondered at that these Parisians, although so difficult to touch, and so thoroughly on their guard, should have been taken by surprise, so to speak, by a love as unselfish and sincere as it was sudden. For they were both of them men of a high order of intellect, with their hearts in the right place, and though, naturally, they had not been altogether innocent of the follies of youth, they were far too refined to allow those follies to take any real hold of them, and so it happened that when, weary of their mode of life, and heart-whole, they met Madame de Guéran, they gave themselves up to her without reflection, without hesitation, charmed by the repose of her beauty, fascinated by the simple grace of her mind, and obeying an instinctive necessity for a purifying and ennobling influence.

She was, indeed, a woman eminently calculated to attract such high-minded, straightforward natures as these. Putting aside the question of mere personal beauty, which was, indeed, conspicuous in her, Laura de Guéran was immeasurably superior to the general run of women, by reason of the originality and refinement of her mind, her fascinating conversational talents, her elevated ideas, her reliable judgment, her artistic nature, her disdain of all beaten tracks and everything commonplace or conventional, her charity, her courage, her uprightness, her devotion to her friends, her horror of evil, and her enthusiasm for good. She had merely said to them—"I am going this way; come with me." And, subjugated and submissive, they obeyed her, without troubling themselves very much as to where, or how far they were going; each of them simply determined not to remain behind whilst it was in his power to be side by side with Madame de Guéran.

As soon as they reached the Chaussée d'Antin, they gave themselves a treat by extolling the object of their adoration, and praising her many merits, and they forgot the dangers of the projected expedition in the ecstacy of the thought that it would be accomplished with her.

Towards midnight, when they were about to separate, M. Périères said to M. de Morin—

"Then you take the doctor on your shoulders entirely?"

"Yes, and I am just going to set about the task."

"But you are at your own door; are you going in?"

"You have hit it. I am going to recruit my strength so as to bring him bound hand and foot."

"I don't understand."

"You will, very soon."

"Good-night, my rival."

"Good-night, my friend."

CHAPTER VII.

M. DE MORIN went up two storeys of a house in the Rue Taitbout, and rang. His servant, who was waiting up for him, came at once to open the door. The young painter went straight towards his bedroom, and, addressing the individual who was following him, candlestick in hand, said—

"Joseph, I am going to bed at once, and I must be called at five o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Are you going on a journey, sir?"

"Not at present."

"Then shall I get ready your shooting things, sir?"

"No, I am not going out shooting. You will merely have ready for me the things I am going to take off."

Joseph, like the well-bred domestic that he was, gave no sign of the astonishment which the order caused him; but, whilst his master was undressing, he thought he might venture on saying—

"Will you kindly grant me, sir, a moment's conversation?"

M. de Morin, who was unbuttoning his waistcoat, raised his head, looked at his valet, who

was standing at attention before him, impassible, respectful, correct in every detail, and then, satisfied, apparently, with his inspection, replied —

"Say on, but be brief—I want to go to sleep."

"Rumours," commenced Joseph with an air of great importance, "have been current in Paris for several days past about a design which you, sir, are supposed to have formed—I make bold to ask you, sir, if there is any foundation for these rumours?"

"To what rumours do you allude?" asked M. de Morin, whilst his servant, on his knees, was taking off his master's boots.

"It is said that you cherish the idea, sir, of setting out for Africa very shortly."

"And it is true. To re-echo your expression, I do cherish that idea."

"Is it your intention, sir, to take me with you?"

"I had not thought of it."

"Would it be inconvenient to you, sir, if, at my request, you allow me to accompany you? I might be of some use, as I was a long time in Africa."

"As how?" asked M. de Morin.

"As *valet de chambre* to a General."

"And in what part of Africa did you live?"

"In Algiers, sir,"

"And you never went out of it?"

"Never."

"That," observed M. de Morin, as he got between the sheets, "will hardly give you a very comprehensive idea of the country which I am about to visit. So I advise you to reflect a

little, and to gather some further information before persisting in your request that I should take you with me. Algiers is a town where one goes to recover one's health, whereas you lose it, as a rule, even if you are lucky enough to preserve your life, in that part of Africa which I propose to traverse."

"That is a matter of no importance, sir," said Joseph, as he tucked his master in. "Africa tempts me, and I take the liberty of repeating my request."

"All right, then. I will see about it, and mention your request to my companions. What increase in wages do you ask if you go with me?"

"None at all, sir. The pleasure of travelling with you, sir, is sufficient. I merely take the liberty of mentioning three wishes."

"Out with them, then, because I am going to sleep."

"The first," replied Joseph, once more at attention in front of his master's bed, "is to secure a small annuity for my family, in case I should die during the expedition."

"That appears to me reasonable enough. Now for the second, for I am half-asleep as it is."

"The second consists of being allowed, on setting foot in Africa, to wear a bûrnus."

This idea appeared so irresistibly comic to M. de Morin that he sat up in bed.

Fearing that he had gone too far in his demands, Joseph hastened to add—

"Pray do not alarm yourself, sir. I will only wear the bûrnus whilst on the march.

When I am in attendance on you, sir, you may be assured that I shall appear in my usual dress. I know the proprieties, sir."

"Be it so, then. And your third wish?"

"Is, that you, sir, will be kind enough to allow me to change my name of Joseph to that of Mohammed. Ever since I lived in Algeria I have dreamt of calling myself Mohammed."

M. de Morin had all his work cut out to keep his countenance over this fresh request. However, he replied, with the utmost gravity—

"If I take you with me to Africa you shall wear a bûrnus and a turban to boot. If you like, you shall call yourself Mohammed; and, in order that you may be at hand, I will find you a horse, an ass, or a camel, according to circumstances."

"You overwhelm me, sir," said Joseph. "Oh, I never dared dream of a camel!"

"You deserve one, Joseph; you deserve one, and you shall have one. But, for the present, allow me to go to sleep. Do you go to bed, too, and don't forget to call me at five, as I have already told you. By-the-way, you may as well bring me something when I awake—it does not matter what."

"A cup of *café noir*, sir?" asked Joseph.

"No, thank you. That would disturb my nerves, and I have need of all my coolness. A plate of soup and a glass of claret will do. Off with you!"

The door shut, and the future explorer of Africa was speedily in the land of dreams.

CHAPTER VIII.

As the clock struck five, Joseph Mohammed entered his master's bedroom, but the latter appeared but little inclined to open his eyes. Joseph, however, knew his duty. If M. de Morin had given an order that he was to be roused at so early an hour, there was evidently something important in the wind, and, consequently, he had no right to sleep. So Mohammed proceeded to pull down the bedclothes with precisely the same precision with which he had tucked them in.

At the first symptom of cold the young painter showed a disposition to protest against such a brutal proceeding, but his valet, always respectful but firm, said to him—

"I am sure, sir, that you would not wish me to have passed a sleepless night to no purpose."

As this reproach had not the desired effect, Joseph thought himself bound to add—

"When an expedition to Africa is contemplated it is just as well to know how to get out of bed."

This time M. de Morin was convinced. With one bound he was on to the handsome tiger-skin which served him for a carpet; he put on his Eastern slippers, got into his dressing-gown, and went into his dressing-room, which Joseph

had lit up to its fullest extent in order to dazzle his master's eyes and complete his awakening. His success was complete, and in five minutes' time M. de Morin had recovered all his gaiety and was hard at work at his toilet, humming the while the very latest air of Offenbach, set to the words of MM. Meilhac and Halévy.

Mohammed, however, did not appear to partake of this light-heartedness. He forgot none of his duties, it is true; he put in the wash-hand basin the proper quantity of *eau de Lubin*, stropped his favourite razor, and at a spirit-lamp warmed the curling-irons for his master's moustaches. But his countenance was gloomy, and his smile sad, and, every now and then, a sigh, but half-suppressed out of respect, escaped from his over-laden heart.

M. de Morin did not condescend to notice this by-play, and his valet, wishing, probably, to attract attention, became somewhat more demonstrative in his grief. At last the young man, whose ears had been saluted by a sigh deeper than usual, asked Joseph what was the matter with him.

"I am broken hearted, sir, broken hearted," was the reply.

"Really? And so you are broken hearted," said M. de Morin, with the utmost indifference, and buttoning his wristbands. "What has happened to you to make you so broken hearted? Have you been giving way to reflection during the night, and has the camel I promised you frightened you?"

"No, sir, it is not the camel which distresses me. I shall welcome that noble animal with open arms. At this moment, sir, I am not thinking of myself; all my thoughts are with you."

"I should not have thought so, Joseph, seeing that you have handed me a pair of black trousers, which, you will admit, are not quite the thing at 5 a.m."

"That depends, sir. In certain momentous circumstances in life black trousers are not to be despised, nor a high waistcoat either which hides the shirt, and does not allow a single spot of white to be seen or to serve as an aim."

This time M. de Morin was completely puzzled.

"What on earth do you mean," he exclaimed, "by your spots of white and your aims? Has the idea of travelling in Africa turned your brain? Put that razor down—you make me nervous."

"Do not be uneasy, sir. My good sense has not deserted me. I should not suffer as I do if I had lost my reason."

"Look here, Joseph. Though I am pretty well accustomed to your eccentricities, you are going a little too far now, and I insist on your explaining yourself, and that without delay. I did not get up at five o'clock in the morning for the sole purpose of giving you an audience."

"Oh! I am not ignorant that you have other affairs on hand, and it is just that which is distressing me."

"And, in your idea, what have I on hand?"

"That is easily guessed, and I am surprised, sir, that you should have imagined that you could keep your plans a secret from me."

"Keep my plans secret!"

"Yes, sir. It would have been very easy to have told me all, and I take the liberty of saying decidedly that my care, my zeal, and my devotion in your service are worthy of this proof of your confidence."

"Do I understand you, then, to imply that I am compelled to tell you where I am going?"

"There is no compulsion, sir. There is no question of any obligation towards me, but you would have only been acting with prudence by claiming my presence in such circumstances as these. I could, at all events, carry the swords or the pistols, keep off the gendarmes, and assist in conveying the wounded one to a carriage."

"Swords! Pistols! Gendarmes! The wounded!" echoed M. de Morin, wondering whether he had not turned prematurely silly.

Suddenly he understood it all, and exclaimed—

"I have it! You fancy that I am going to fight a duel."

"What else could I think, sir?" said Joseph, very grave and solemn. "Did you not tell me that you were neither going on a journey, nor out shooting?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well then, sir, for what other reason than an affair of honour would you leave the house

at five o'clock in the morning, contrary to your usual custom and the usages of high life?"

He pronounced the words "high life" with an accent perfectly irresistible, and then went on to say—

"And besides, sir, you told me to fetch your duelling pistols from Devisme's. It is clear, it is more than clear—alas! it is evident."

This evidence apparently struck M. de Morin also, for he at once proceeded to reassure his faithful servant.

"You are mistaken, Joseph," he said, kindly, "and your vivid imagination has led you astray. I got up this morning at five o'clock simply to go to my club, where, for a reason which, with your permission, I will keep to myself, I wish to arrive calm and collected, after a few hours' sleep. You may come with me, if that will ease your mind. As regards my pistols, I desire, in anticipation of this expedition, to practice my shooting every day, and you can take them to the shooting-gallery in the course of the morning. And now that my frank explanations have restored you to your usual serenity, perhaps you will have the goodness to bring in the soup and claret I ordered, and once more resume that engaging manner which becomes you so well."

This last suggestion was superfluous, for a smile was once more visible on Joseph's lips.

A quarter of an hour afterwards M. de Morin ascended the staircase of his club, passed through an entrance hall where two servants lay asleep

on the benches, and entered the only room which at that moment was occupied.

It was the room devoted, as in most clubs, to baccarat. Along the walls were to be seen roomy couches, whereon to repose from the excitement of play, and where, when the cards were adverse, the unlucky player could snatch a moment or two of sleep whilst waiting for a change of luck. In one corner was placed a table, at which a confidential servant sat, elevated, so to speak, to the dignity of cashier. His duty was to give the player, on demand, counters of all sorts, sizes, and colours, which were intended to represent certain amounts, from the highest to the lowest. Indeed, in all well conducted clubs, it is not customary to have the tables covered with gold or bank notes. These are represented by counters, or fish, in exchange for which, on the following day, as soon as each loser has paid his losses, the cashier hands over their money value. Gambling debts must be paid, not within forty-eight hours, as is generally understood, but really within a limit of sixty hours. This term passed, the member of the club who has lost his counters, if he has not handed in their corresponding value in money, is subject to a penalty which is termed "being posted" and consists in his name being written up on a board hung in the principal room of the club. This punishment is very rarely carried into effect. The unlucky gambler, who has lost more than he can pay, can generally count

upon the forbearance of his creditor, and comes to some arrangement with him. If he does not succeed in doing that, his name, after being posted for a moment only, is rubbed out. He *ipso facto* no longer belongs to the club, and his reputation is thereby seriously damaged.

These details are necessary in order to comprehend the scene which was on the point of being enacted between M. de Morin and the young doctor, called Delange, whom he had undertaken to secure as a travelling companion in the expedition.

A large oval table, covered with green cloth, and lighted by lamps hung from the ceiling, took up most of the space in the room we have attempted to describe. In the centre sat the player who held the bank for the time being. On either side of him, to the right or left, he dealt the cards to his fellow players, who were thus divided into two groups, or "sides," to use the recognized description. In front of him were several packs of cards which, when they had been once used, he threw into a sort of leathern bowl placed on the table.

As M. de Morin entered this baccarat room some half-a-score players were commencing another set, and by them his arrival was noisily welcomed.

"Holloa! de Morin, come along! Where do you spring from at this hour? A supper party, of course. Fearful depravity! Your family must be communicated with, and asked to interfere. A splendid game, my dear fellow.

Not many of us, it is true, but all of the right sort. Come along and take a hand. Sit by me and bring me luck."

At such an hour a new-comer was a god-send, and the heartiness of the welcome given to M. de Morin had, in reality, nothing personal about it. The winners, anxious to get away with their winnings, but hesitating to leave lest their departure should be too noticeable, were delighted at the arrival of a recruit ready to take their place, and the losers, on the other hand, interested in prolonging the game so that they might have a chance of recouping themselves, were jubilant over the increase to their number, and with that superstition inherent in all gamblers, trusted that the new arrival would turn the tide of fortune in their favour.

M. de Morin, having by a glance satisfied himself that M. Delange, true to his habits, was seated at the baccarat table, secured a supply of counters to the amount of five thousand francs, and, as the bank was up and nobody seemed anxious for it, took it himself.

CHAPTER IX.

In a very few moments M. de Morin had doubled his bank, which now amounted to ten thousand francs.

That this would happen might have easily been foreseen, for baccarat cannot be classed amongst games of chance, properly so called, and, consequently it is, if not actually recognized, at all events tolerated in many clubs. It requires to be played with plenty of coolness, and even then only on the basis of certain calculations. It is evident that a player who has to contend against successive runs of eights and nines must inevitably go to the wall, however well he may play, but, as a matter of fact, such knock-down blows are very exceptional. The fall of the cards, as a rule, ranges between one and seven, and this average allows of certain rules for play being formulated, which it is important to study. For instance, whether it is good play to ask for a card when you hold a five and you do not yet know your adversary's play; or whether the banker, after having dealt an ace or a two to the right "side," and a court card to the left, should stand at five. All a matter of inspiration, according to some people, but entirely a matter of calculation in the opinion of regular baccarat players.

But, when the players have been at it for some time, without rest or cessation, they very

often forget all about their calculations, and simply trust to chance. Their vaunted science disappears before what they are pleased to call their inspirations, and, for that very reason, the greater part of their winnings disappears, too. Consequently those who, cool and fresh, drop in upon them unexpectedly, are pretty nearly sure to win. These new comers are like troops in reserve. After having been held inactive during the progress of an extended engagement, they receive a sudden order to advance to the attack, and must necessarily get the better of any division of the enemy which has been ever since the morning sustaining repeated onslaughts, is beginning to run short of ammunition, and is ready to drop with fatigue.

M. de Morin, with his skin cool and his head clear, completely master of his game and not in the least pre-occupied, was in a position to watch his adversaries and profit by their mistakes. From their countenances, from the nervous twitching of their wearied hands, and from the exclamations which escaped them unawares, he could tell what they thought of their cards, and could regulate his own play accordingly. If, when worn out with the fatigue and feverish excitement of the game, they stood on a seven, thinking it was an eight, or if they made a mistake in the points of the game, the new comer, as he had every right to do, appealed to the rules and insisted upon their being adhered to.

He also had another, and a very apparent advantage in the game, because, although he was

banker, and the players were divided into two sides, he only paid attention to the right side, to which M. Delange belonged. He only cared about winning on that side, and did not trouble himself about the other. For example, if he dealt a ten on his right and a three on his left, he would stand at five, or even at four, although the proper game in such a case would be to take cards. He had only one end in view, and that a secret one, which he pursued with great dexterity—to win as much money as possible from the doctor.

This result was attained all the more easily because his adversary, tired, unnerved, and chafing against the bad luck which fell, on this particular occasion even more than usual, to his share, was playing wildly. At 9 a.m. he had lost some thirty thousand francs. The other players, whose losses were of minor importance, or who had come off quits, wanted to leave off when the waiters appeared to open the shutters and let in the light of day, but M. Delange having insisted on play being continued, a further term of an hour was agreed upon. Coffee was called for, and the game again went on fast and furious.

At 10 a.m. the doctor had lost eighty-five thousand francs. One more bank was started, the last, and then just one more, and afterwards positively the last.

At length play ceased, and each of the players, more or less fatigued and out of spirits, betook himself to his room, and went to bed.

CHAPTER X.

On the following morning, about eleven o'clock, just as M. de Morin was getting ready to go out, the faithful Joseph informed him that Dr. Delange wished to see him. "Aha!" said the young painter to himself. "Now I've got him!" and he at once gave the order for his visitor to be shown up.

Notwithstanding his knowledge of the world, the Doctor could not, on meeting M. de Morin, hide a certain degree of embarrassment; in fact, he was decidedly uncomfortable and by no means at his ease. His face alone, had need been, would have told the painter that an important service was to be solicited.

"You are surprised to see me?" commenced M. Delange, with a very hesitating manner.

"Not the least in the world. Why should such a happy thought on your part astonish me? You had an hour to spare before breakfast, and you are giving me the benefit of it. I am delighted."

"Alas!" replied the Doctor, "I am not here for the pleasure alone of seeing you. I want to speak to you about a matter of considerable importance."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"You know that I was a heavy loser at the Club the other night."

"Yes, and I am very sorry for it. You see, I wanted to stop playing at eight o'clock, but you were so persistent that I was compelled to carry on the bank."

"Good Heavens! My loss then was more than I could pay, and I wanted to go on, in the hope of getting some of it back. It is the old story over again."

"That is bad. What is the amount of your loss?"

"Ninety thousand francs."

"It is a lot, a very big lot, and I sympathise with you sincerely."

"But worse remains behind," said the Doctor, and his voice trembled. "It is absolutely impossible for me to pay up just at present."

"You don't mean to say so! That is unfortunate, very unfortunate. What will they say at the Club? They have this year been very much down on all that sort of thing. The Committee decided, at their last meeting, to apply the rule in all its severity."

"I know all about it. I shall be posted in twenty-four hours."

"And are you really unable to avoid this—this—unpleasantness?"

"Utterly unable," replied M. Delange.

"Come, let us think it over. Two heads are better than one. Is there no one who would help you out of your difficulty? You have plenty of friends, and rich ones, too."

"The amount is too large. I should never manage to get hold of so much all at once."

He stopped, hesitated for a moment or two, and then, taking courage, said—

"You, and you alone, can, if you will, get me out of this scrape."

"I! Do you imagine that I could lend you ninety thousand francs? My dear fellow, if you only knew how terribly I am in want of money just now, and what expense I am put to! I am, as you may perhaps have heard, about to undertake a tremendously costly journey, and I am bound to scrape together every farthing I can get hold of."

"You do not understand me," replied the Doctor. "I do not ask you to lend me this amount; I only ask you not to press me for payment at once."

"I do not understand you now. Please explain."

"Did you not win about ninety thousand francs the other night?"

"Possibly. I have not yet made up my account."

"Well, at all events, I lost all that you won."

"Excuse me," said M. de Morin, very curtly, "I do not admit that. Counters have very properly been brought into use in clubs in order to avoid all disputes between the players. Consequently, my dear sir, you do not owe me a farthing, not a single farthing. I have in my drawer a larger number of counters, which I shall take with me to the Club when I go there,

either to-night or to-morrow, and, in exchange for them, the Club, my sole debtor, will give me bank notes."

"The Club," said M. Delange, nervously, "will reply, or will cause you to be informed, that as the accounts for the game in question have not been settled, it is not in a position to pay you."

"In that case I shall complain to the Committee. As for you, Doctor, you will have no reproaches from me. I assure you, once more, that I do not look upon you as my debtor."

"Be it so; but the Club will look upon me as its debtor, and, as we have already said, that means being posted."

"What on earth do you want me to do?" exclaimed M. de Morin.

"I want you—I want you—" replied M. Delange, hesitating. "I do not know how to put it, but there is a way—"

"What is it?"

"The only plan is for you, when you hand in your counters, not to ask for any money in exchange, but to say merely that you and I have arranged everything between ourselves. I shall be your debtor all the same, you understand, and I give you my word of honour to pay you as soon as I possibly can."

"I do not doubt it, but you are asking me—"

"It would save me! It would save me!" cried the Doctor, whose distress was now at its height.

"It would save you!" replied M. de Morin.

"I do not quite see that. I fear that, on the contrary, I should be doing you a very bad turn. You would continue to be a member of the Club; you would play with equal recklessness, and suffer similar losses. Your debt, already of some magnitude, would increase considerably, and the ruin, which to-day merely threatens you, would in three or four months become inevitable. No, no—in your interest, and purely out of sympathy with you, I am anxious to compel you to forsake the life you are now leading. Only think of the brilliant career that lies before you! And you have neglected, nay, almost cast it on one side altogether, simply to give yourself up, soul and body, to a passion which must ruin you."

"There is yet time enough for me to set to work in earnest," replied M. Delange. "If I can only manage honourably to get out of the false position in which I am now placed, I promise solemnly to hand in my resignation as a member of the club, and never to touch a card again in my life."

"Oh, yes!" replied M. de Morin. "'When the devil was sick, the devil a saint would be,' &c., &c., we know all that. But I tell you plainly that if you remain in Paris, and with your present set, you will come to grief sooner or later. You must summon up courage to expatriate yourself, and go far, far away."

"But Paris is the only place where I am known, and where I have any chance of re-

pairing my shattered fortune and getting out of your debt."

"Nonsense! But there is, possibly, another door open to you. Light this cigar, and give me your undivided attention. An idea has struck me."

M. Delange looked up quickly, and M. de Morin, after having taken a few vigorous whiffs at his cigar, continued his remarks as follows—

"Are you of opinion that if I do you the service you wish me to do, I, in turn, have a right to ask you for something in exchange?"

"Certainly, you may dispose of me as you will, I shall be entirely at your orders."

"Even," replied M. de Morin, and he spoke very slowly and dwelt on each word so that his hearer might be taken as little as possible by surprise, "even supposing that it should be a question of undertaking with me this journey I am contemplating, or, in other words, of accompanying me to Africa?"

The young Doctor was evidently not prepared for this proposal, and could not, in spite of the oratorical precautions of M. de Morin, repress a movement of surprise. Nevertheless, he replied at once—

"I would go with you. To what part of Africa are you going?"

"Equatorial Africa."

"You know that it is terribly unhealthy? You may lose your skin there. Pardon the expression, it is proverbial."

"And it is true," replied the young painter. "But we have just come to the conclusion, I think, that in Paris it is possible, under certain conditions, and with certain proclivities, to lose one's honour."

M. Delange took the hint, and hastened to say—

"The unhealthiness of Africa does not alarm me as far as I myself am concerned. I spoke solely in your interest; I am a doctor, and so free from all fear of diseases."

"Then, speaking generally, you will not raise any serious objections to accompany my friends and me?"

"Certainly not, if you require me so to do. In what capacity shall I join you?"

"As our medical adviser, and *savant* generally to the expedition."

"But how am I to make money by it?" asked the Doctor. "Do you imagine that I shall secure a large practice amongst the tribes of Africa, forsooth? I shall return to Paris perhaps in a year, more probably not for several, quite forgotten, and without having discharged my gambling debt to you."

"First of all, I want you to understand that the all-important point is to wean you from your evil habits of play—that is essential. Secondly, you will very probably get rid of your liability to me."

"I do not understand you. Do you offer me ninety thousand francs to accompany you?"

"I offer you nothing of the sort. The sum

you mention is either too much or too little. Our mutual position in society precludes me from offering you a salary, and you from accepting such an offer. But," added M. de Morin, after a long pull at his cigar, "I can give you your revenge for the day before yesterday."

"My revenge!" exclaimed the Doctor, whose face lighted up in a moment. "You will promise to give me my revenge?"

"Why not?"

"Then I may win back my losses? I may—"

"You may free yourself from your liabilities to me, and still not go to Africa? That is your meaning, as I take it."

"I assure you—"

"Confess," continued M. de Morin, without paying the slightest attention to the interruption, "that if I were to offer you such an opportunity, I should be an egregious ass. What? You owe me already a sum which you cannot pay, and I am to enter into an engagement to commence afresh, perhaps to increase the amount, which would be futile, or possibly to lose it, which would be idiotic, for you might very well end some day in getting back all your losses?"

"Why, then, did you say anything about my having my revenge?"

"Your revenge under certain conditions."

"Will you kindly explain them to me?"

"That is exactly what I want to do. But it is nearly noon, so let us go to breakfast, and we will discuss it and my ideas together."

An hour later MM. de Morin and Delange, seated face to face in a private room at Bignon's, called for their coffee and writing materials together, and drew up the following contract, on which, after a lengthy discussion, they had agreed.

Art. 1. Dr. Delange hereby acknowledges to being indebted to M. de Morin in the sum of ninety thousand francs, lost at cards.

Art. 2. M. de Morin undertakes to state that this sum has been paid to him, though such is not the case.

Art. 3. In token of his gratitude to M. de Morin for his forbearance and consideration in this matter, Dr. Delange gives his word of honour that within a space of a few weeks he will quit Paris for the purpose of accompanying M. de Morin, for a period of 300 days, to any countries, wheresoever they may be, which the latter may wish to visit.

Art. 4. It is agreed between the contracting parties that, on each day during the voyage, without a single exception, unless in the case of acute and dangerous illness, a game at cards shall take place between MM. de Morin and Delange.

Art. 5. The loser on each night shall have the right of choosing on the following day any game he may elect to play from amongst the well-known games at cards, or he may even select any other game or a bet in lieu of cards.

Art. 6. On no pretext whatever shall the stakes exceed fifty louis per diem. It is, there-

fore, perfectly understood that three hundred *parties* of 1,000 francs each are to be played within the space of three hundred days.

Art. 7. The two adversaries shall have the right of fixing, by mutual agreement, the hour when play is to commence; but, should they not agree, the loser shall decide. He may choose the very moment which will suit him best, and may even, in case of need, awake his adversary, should the latter summon sleep to aid him in evading his engagement.

Art. 8. The loser shall also have the right of naming the place, whether it be railway carriage, bridge of a steamer, tent, lake, river, plain, mountain, or desert. At a given signal, his adversary shall be bound to follow him into the shade, the sun, or the water, to the mast-head, or the summit of a mountain-peak.

Art. 9. On the 301st day the account shall be made up. If M. de Morin, after having deducted the ninety thousand francs due to him this day, is the loser, he undertakes to hand over to his adversary a cheque on some banker in Paris, and M. Delange will at once be at liberty to return to France. If, on the other hand, the latter is still in his debt, he will be at liberty to frame a fresh contract for one, two, or three hundred days, at his option, under the conditions already set forth.

Given under our hands at Paris this tenth day of September, one thousand eight-hundred and seventy-two.

As soon as the various clauses of this con-

tract had been committed to paper, M. de Morin said to the Doctor—

"You remember exactly what we have just written?"

"Perfectly."

"And you are quite sure of not forgetting it?"

"I am quite sure."

"Very well. Amongst men like ourselves I am of opinion that there is no necessity for any written agreement. I give you my word that I will faithfully, and to the letter, carry out these engagements. Will you give me yours?"

"I will."

"Then I propose to burn this document."

"I agree, and thank you for your proposal."

In an instant the flames of the taper, brought for the purpose of lighting their cigars, had reduced the contract to ashes.

CHAPTER XI.

The same evening the new doctor of the expedition was presented to Madame de Guéran. M. Delange, as long as his passion for play left him at rest, was an exceedingly nice fellow, a pleasant companion, with a fund of agreeable conversation, and very well informed. He impressed the Baroness very favourably, and she at once endorsed the choice made by M. de Morin.

The chief parts in the expedition were thus filled up, and there was nothing now to do but to select the subordinates. The application of the trusty Joseph-Mohammed was then taken into consideration, and, after a short discussion, accepted. It was determined, at the same time, to add to him some other European servant. In Egypt, according to custom, a few Arabian attendants were to be engaged, who might not, in every way, be all that could be wished, but whose familiarity with the usages of the country would be of great use in many contingencies.

An exception was, however, made to this limit in favour of a female companion whom the Baroness desired to have with her. As soon as the expedition had been decided on, Madame

de Guéran had written to her friends in London to find out for her a lady of irreproachable respectability, who had already travelled and was willing to travel again, and the result was the immediate offer of a Miss Beatrice Poles. She had, it was said, accompanied the celebrated Dutch traveller, Mdlle. Alexina Tinne, throughout the greater part of her explorations in Africa, and with the courage and determination so remarkable in the case of many female travellers, she only asked to be allowed to expose herself to fresh fatigue, and to encounter new dangers.

The Baroness at first hesitated to engage this applicant. Miss Poles, she thought, might, whilst in the service of Mdlle. Tinne, have become accustomed to an amount of ease and luxury which she certainly would not find in the society of her new companions. In fact, Madame de Guéran, without having any idea of travelling in as primitive a fashion as did the pretended dervish, Vambéry, or Dr. Barth, or many others, had fully made up her mind not to dazzle the Arabs and negroes by any display of magnificence. In barbarous countries cupidity and envy can never be roused with impunity, and the Thouaregs proved that by the massacre of Mdlle. Tinne under the very eyes of Miss Poles.

But the friends of Madame de Guéran in England brought fresh arguments to bear on her hesitation. Their *protégée*, they said, from her experience of Africa, and her thorough

knowledge of the customs of the country, would be of the greatest use, and, moreover, both her zeal and unlimited devotion might be relied upon. These arguments prevailed with Madame de Guéran, and she accordingly engaged the whilom companion of Mdlle. Tinne.

Miss Beatrice Poles, to judge from her appearance, was about forty years of age when she first made her appearance in Madame de Guéran's drawing-room, in the Boulevard Malesherbes. She was a tall, angular female, so thin that she looked as if she had been flattened out by hydraulic pressure, and so dry and withered-looking that M. de Morin was quite uneasy when he saw her near the fire. She had a long neck, long arms, stilts, presumably, for legs, and feet which were a source of never-ending admiration to M. Périères. "They were so long," he said, "that she need never walk. She arrived at her destination before starting."

Her face was almost entirely hidden by huge blue spectacles, with side-guards, which she had got into the habit of wearing in Africa, to protect her against the diseases of the eye so prevalent in that country. Under a tropical sun she had lost that fresh colour which had in former days, as she professed in her moments of confidence, rendered her so attractive, and her complexion had become embrowned to such an extent that she might very well have been taken for a negress. That such a mistake was possible is evident from the

"Times," which in giving an account of the death of Mdlle. Tinne, said—"The other servants succeeded in escaping with the exception of a negress, who was carried off by the Thouaregs." The negress was no other than Miss Beatrice Poles, an Englishwoman, and a cockney to boot.

She was a most estimable woman, all the same, well brought up, speaking English, French, and Arabic, understanding a joke, and quick at repartee, without prejudice, and, a rarity in Englishwomen, free from prudery, but that was to be accounted for by her familiarity with the manners and customs of the not too particular tribes of Africa.

After his first interview with her, M. de Morin asked permission to paint her portrait, which she graciously accorded. Underneath the sketch he wrote—"Return from Africa. This is how we shall all look when we come back."

CHAPTER XII.

As soon as the establishment of masters and servants was complete, a meeting took place at Madame de Guéran's apartments to distribute the duties which remained to be carried out. Each one, according to his or her position and means, had a proportionate share of purchases to make, letters to write, information to obtain, packages to see to, and excursions to undertake.

The experience of Miss Beatrice Poles was of the utmost value. She ransacked the shops from morning to night, and bought or ordered a thousand things of which nobody else would have dreamt. So untiring and energetic was she, that one evening, when she was recounting her perigrinations throughout Paris, M. de Morin said to her—

"Of course, to accomplish all this, you took a cab?"

"A cab!" she exclaimed indignantly. "I never set foot in one except I am absolutely compelled. Any kind of locomotion you like, except that. I never can bring myself to be shut up in those pill-boxes on wheels. The inaction you are condemned to in them worries and frets me to a degree, and would soon wear me out."

"Miss Poles," replied the painter, with a countenance irresistibly comic in its immobility, "I should like to point out to you that your pedestrian feats, and your activity generally are also wearing you out. You are a model of proportion—and I am only too happy to do you justice in that respect—but, at the same time, on the score of *embonpoint*, there is, possibly, something to be desired."

"And that," replied Miss Poles, "is entirely due to the life of inaction I have led in England for the last two years. Luxury does not suit my temperament at all. In peace and quietness I lose flesh, to regain it as soon as ever I resume an active existence. At the end of a month of Africa you will not recognize me, and, even now, by reason of the life I am leading in Paris, I have gained a pound."

"Whereabouts?" asked M. de Morin, absorbed in contemplation, and in the futile attempt to discover the exact locality of the vaunted addition.

Dr. Delange was equally zealous in fulfilling the duties which devolved upon him. Having given his word of honour to M. de Morin not to touch a card as long as he remained in Paris, he was anxious to get out of it as quickly as possible, in order that the series of *parties*, promised under the contract, might commence. But, if the gambler in him was still unsubdued and burning with an unabated fever for play, the *savant* and the doctor combined were equally wide awake. Committed, in an unfore-

seen and eccentric fashion, to an expedition of which, only a fortnight before, he never dreamt, M. Delange, gambling being out of the question, did not in the least regret the engagement into which he had entered. The study of medicine, to a man gifted with intelligence, anxious to learn, and despising the beaten tracks to knowledge, is a perpetual excursion into unknown lands—a veritable voyage of discovery. Thus, the young doctor, who had hitherto made his voyages and carried out his discoveries in his own study, rejoiced at the idea of exploring on a large scale, and in a more active fashion.

Thanks to the well-known courtesy of M. Malte-Brun, then the editor of the "*Annales des Voyages*," and a corresponding member of all the Geographical Societies of Europe, as well as a friend of all the great explorers in the world, M. Delange obtained some very valuable information as to the diseases against which he would have to use his skill in Africa, the precautions to be taken to steer clear of them, and the various remedies best suited to the different districts and climates. He also devoted himself, more seriously than he had hitherto done, to the study of Natural History, hoping soon to be able to do good service to that branch of science.

Dr. Desrioux, by way of pleasing Madame de Guéran, placed his services at the disposal of his *confrère*. He thought of everything, was ever on the watch, and made many suggestions,

the value of which, later on and in time of peril, was amply proved. Although he could not leave Paris, he was as deeply interested in everything connected with the projected expedition, as if he were going to form part of it—he was, in fact, its soul.

As for Joseph, he had been beside himself with joy ever since the memorable day when he was informed that he was to take part in the expedition. At last his dreams were about to be realized—an Arab name, a bûrnus, a camel! As for the name, he assumed it at once, without any tender regret for the one he had hitherto borne. At all the shops where he made his purely personal purchases, he gave as his address — Mohammed-Abd-el-Gazal. It appeared to him decidedly more *distingué* than Joseph, and imbued him with an Eastern tinge.

The camel—well, unfortunately, he would have to wait for that. But when M. de Morin gave him a holiday to say good-bye to his family, Joseph allowed his relatives to slide, as the Americans say, and betook himself to the *Jardin des Plantes* to gaze on the camels, and study their habits. He even succeeded in inducing one of the keepers to let him lay a tenderly caressing hand on one of those noble coursers of the desert, or as Joseph, ever high-sounding and figurative, would call them, those placid beasts.

Neither did he lose any time in becoming the proud possessor of the most correct and ample of bûrnus, this national garment having been

willingly surrendered to him by an Arab servant, whose master was then staying at the Grand-Hôtel. Joseph was perpetually, night and day, trying on this bûrnus, and when he had draped it round him he would solemnly walk up and down his room in the Rue Taitbout. M. de Morin, who had not been apprized of this new caprice of his servant, and was, consequently, not prepared for the metamorphosis, thought, when he returned home one evening, that his rooms were frequented by ghosts.

The Arab servant, moreover, for a consideration, taught Joseph his maternal tongue, and the new pupil, studious to excess, practised the language unremittingly, and was all day long, even whilst in attendance on his master, giving utterance to the most extraordinary sounds. When spoken to on the subject by M. de Morin, he replied emphatically—

"You should not object, sir, seeing that I am preparing to open the gates of the desert for you."

These philological studies, these struttings in the bûrnus, and the lengthened investigation into the manners and customs of camels, rather disturbed the brain of Mohammed-Abd-el-Gazal, and made him at times somewhat absent. If M. de Morin asked for a glass of water, Joseph, his mind ever occupied with the expedition, would bring him a compass or a patent pedometer. One day, at breakfast time, instead of laying on the table the time-honoured white cloth, he spread out a huge map of Africa, and

on it placed the plates and dishes, and other paraphernalia. When his mistake was pointed out to him, he said very plainly that he did not regret it, because, as he told his master, it was an advantage, instead of having before him a simple piece of linen, which expressed nothing, to feast his eyes on a splendid bird's-eye view of mountains, lakes, seas, rivers, and so to exercise, at one and the same time, his gastronomic and intellectual abilities.

"*Utile dulci*," added Joseph, who was a classic on occasion.

Sometimes, too, Mohammed would leave the windows open, and light all the candles, so that, as he said, the insects in the neighbourhood might be attracted, and that thus he might accustom himself to the bites of the mosquitoes so prevalent in Africa. In short, he neglected nothing, and, ever on the look-out for something oriental, he struck up, during his last days in Paris, a friendship with a negress of the purest ebony. Hoping to enlist her sympathies, and recall to her some recollections of her childhood, he expatiated, without cessation, on the horrors of slavery. Unfortunately for him, the negress, born at Martinique years after the emancipation of the slaves, did not understand one word of his conversation.

M. de Morin was at length obliged to beg Joseph to attend a little more to his legitimate duties, and a little less to Arabs and negresses, but Mohammed shut him up at once by saying—

"Reassure yourself, sir; I shall be strictly correct in the desert."

CHAPTER XIII.

The 10th of October arrived, and everything was in readiness for a start. The day of departure was fixed, and berths engaged for Egypt on board one of those magnificent steamers belonging to the Messageries Company, leaving Marseilles at 9 a.m. on each alternate Sunday.

Madame de Guéran, who was especially anxious to avoid attracting attention to herself, had begged her companions to make their preparations with as little fuss as possible, and, above all things, to keep the newspapers in the dark. They respected her wishes, and not a word appeared in print. But the "cat was let out of the bag," proverbially speaking, in England, where, for some time past, she had asked for advice and information of all kinds.

In London, at the latest meeting of the Royal Geographical Society, the President, after having given a brief account of the journeys of the Baron de Guéran, alluded to his labours, and touched upon his death, so disastrous in the interests of science and so wanting in confirmation from official sources, mentioned the intention of Madame de Guéran to penetrate into the interior of Africa, as far as the spot where her husband had perished. He also

called attention to the fact that the intending traveller, although the widow of a Frenchman, and residing in Paris, was an Englishwoman, and the daughter of one of the original members of the Society. He concluded by wishing, on behalf of himself and all present, the expedition every success.

Following the example thus set by England, the Geographical Society of Paris thought fit also to devote a few lines, in its journal of October, 1872, to Madame de Guéran and her companions. It spoke of the journeys already made by Miss Beatrice Poles with Mdlle. Tinne, and even mentioned Joseph, describing him, from information afterwards suspected to have been supplied by himself—Mohammed Abd-el-Gazal, dragoman.

It was on the 14th October, 1872, that the new band of explorers met at the Lyons Railway Station to take the express to Marseilles, and every one was there to the moment.

Several persons, relations and intimate friends, were there to see them off, and, in a corner of the waiting-room, might be seen an Arab and a negress, who would not let Mohammed go without some mark of their tender regret.

Dr. Desrioux and his mother, who, for some days past had been frequent visitors at the house of Madame de Guéran, were also at the station, and obtained permission to accompany the Baroness on to the platform. When the guard's whistle sounded, Madame Desrioux, pointing to

her son, pressed Madame de Guéran's hand affectionately, and whispered—

"I thank you for having left him to me."

Laura made no reply, but, pale as death and with her eyes filled with tears, she hurried into the carriage to hide her emotion. The whistle of the engine sounded, and the train moved off. For a long time M. Desrioux followed it with his eyes, standing motionless and sad, and his mother had to take hold of his arm to induce him to leave the station. As soon as he was alone with her in the carriage which took them home, this man of science, this man, supposed to be superior to every weakness, cried like a child.

And in the meanwhile, the train which was conveying the new African explorers sped on its way. The journey had begun.

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM MISS BEATRICE POLES, TO MISS EMILY ——.

"Although this letter is dated 'Cairo,' do not imagine, my dear friend, that I am going to describe that town. If you are really anxious to see it through my spectacles, you have only to turn to my letters of 1861, when I was assisting that most charming of all charming travellers, Alexina Tinne, to arrange the expedition which was to have reached the sources of the Nile, and in them you will find a very detailed account of Egypt. Consequently, for some time to come, you must not expect any geographical details. That part of Africa where I now am does not count for anything—it is far too civilized. The Nile merely recalls the Thames to my mind, and, as for the streets of Cairo, they are to me just like the Strand. Africa, eastwards, does not begin, in my idea, until you reach the latitude of Khartoum. When we get that far, and not until then, I will give you a bird's-eye view or two of the country. So, dearest, for the present, let us put geography on one side, and come to purely personal topics.

"You were rather angry with me, dear, were

you not, on account of my sudden flitting, my hasty desertion from our cosy evenings and the tea which you know so well how to make, and my surrender of the excellent position which your interest obtained for me with that dear Mrs. Oxenford, to whom I send my warmest regards.

"I could not remain in a situation—the monotony is too much for me. Nature, you may depend upon it, had some design in view when she gave me such prolonged feet. They are ever beckoning the rest of my body onward; and my other members, smaller and less self-asserting, have nothing to do but obey. I verily believe that, if I were fool-hardy enough to attempt any resistance, they would end by simply detaching themselves, and setting out, unaccompanied, in search of adventure. Consequently, as in that case I should lose, if not the most becoming, at all events the most extensive part of myself, I prefer giving way. Every being in this world obeys an irresistible impulse of some kind. Many are guided by their head, which, not being weighty enough, turns and twists in empty nothingness at the mercy of every wind; others follow the dictates of their heart, and a pretty mess they make of it. As for me, I obey my feet. They very often lead me into terrible quagmires, but, as a rule, I get off with the loss of my shoes.

"Well, see me once more on my travels. I have deserted you, dearest, in the most shameful manner, have once more parted company

with dear old England—for, notwithstanding my faithlessness, I love her—and the worst of it is that I have not the remotest idea whither I am bound. I am to go somewhere, and that is all that either I or my feet care about. They were beside themselves with joy, and frisked—nay, positively twinkled to such an extent, that it was a treat to see them. They are perfect beauties, I assure you, at such moments, and out-do themselves in expression.

"All the information I had was that I was wanted for another journey to Africa. But what part of Africa? And with whom was I destined to travel? What would be the component parts of the expedition? Should I be mixed up with geologists, astronomers, naturalists, zoologists, hydrographers, ethnologists, ideologists, ornithologists, or ethnographers? For expeditions, worthy the name, are made up of all those elements; they are the real stock-in-trade of a caravan.

"On my arrival in Paris, after presenting my letters of introduction to Madame de Guéran, I asked her to present me to the scientific members of the expedition, and she, to begin with, introduced me to a little doctor, who, in the sweetest voice imaginable, said—

"'Miss Poles, I have far more confidence in your experience than in my own diplomas. If we are ill, you are the one to take care of us, and I resign my functions into your hands.'

"'And, in that case, what are you going to do?' I asked.

"'I shall devote myself to natural history,' was the reply.

"And, so saying, he looked me up and down with an air of the greatest curiosity, as if I were some specimen in spirits of wine in a bottle.

"My next introduction was to a literary individual, and a very good-looking fellow into the bargain.

"'Miss Poles,' he commenced, 'I hear that you have been a prisoner with the Thouaregs, and I hope you will do me the favour of recounting to me your adventures whilst in the midst of that whimsical tribe. I should like to work them up into an article for the "*Revue de France*.

"'Certainly not, sir,' said I, horrified, 'certainly not. The bare idea of having every detail of my life held up to the public gaze revolts me.'

"'Pardon me, if I have been indiscreet,' was his reply. 'I thought yours was merely a case of ordinary captivity.'

"'And, I, sir, never said it was not.'

"'My dear Miss Poles,' went on this impudent little animal, 'if I had only known that—'

"'Once more, sir—'

"'Not a word, Miss Poles, not a word. I will not ask any more questions.'

"Truly, these Parisians are unbearable. Judge for yourself. The last individual presented to me was a M. de Morin, a painter. Without giving me time to put my hair straight, or arrange my dress, or strike an atti-

tude, out came his pencils, and in I went into his album.

"The likeness is good enough, I must confess; but I detest those sketchy productions which cannot possibly give any idea of womanly attractions. Fortunately, however, M. de Morin has promised me a portrait in oils, in which he will do his best to reproduce my smile and the brightness of my eyes.

"You know, dearest, that I am not given to illusions, and that I know exactly what value to place on myself. I am not what is called a pretty woman, but I have in my expression, in my look, a certain softness, a mellowness, in fact, such as the Spaniards term *morbidez*. A Thouareg Chief said to me one day—but I will not expatiate on these details. You know them, and we will keep them to ourselves.

"At first, as you will have guessed, this expedition did not inspire me with any great amount of confidence. The doctor did not want to have anything to do with medicine, the literary man wanted to pry into my private life, and the painter, instead of reserving his pencils for African curiosities, sketched me in *déshabille*.

"Well, my dear, I was mistaken. These people are originals, certainly, *fantaisistes*, as they call themselves; humourists, as we in England should call them; but they are very nice, and in reality very much in earnest. I think I shall get on with them, if they will only keep

from being jealous of each other about me. The fact is—why should I try to hide it from you, the faithful depositary of all my secrets?—the fact is, I am afraid that all of them will make love to me.

"Already M. de Morin has bestowed on me some tender glances, whose meaning there is no mistaking, and I shall need all my tact, circumspection, and reserve, and plenty of the last. I have made up my mind to favour no one of the three, and so I trust that the expedition may pass over without any regular proposal.

"And, besides, I can rely upon Madame de Guéran for protection against any annoyance. These three gentlemen, but especially the painter and the literary man, are her slaves, body and soul. I thought at first that they were in love with her; but as I now see that they do not pay her a single compliment, but reserve all their attentions and flirtations for me, I am obliged to come to an opposite conclusion.

"And I am very glad to think that there is no chance of rivalry between the Baroness and me, for it would be very painful to me to wound in any way so thoroughly genial a woman. I am delighted to give her her due, for she is a high-minded, good-natured creature. Neither is she by any means deficient in firmness of character and resolute courage—in fact, she reminds me very much of that dear Miss Tinne, both as regards her beauty, her independence of character and her love of adventure. But I shall feel very much safer with the Baroness than I ever could

with Alexina, who was a little too eccentric, poor dear, and involved us in adventures which I, for one, do not care to have repeated.

"But, here I am lingering over my chat with you, dearest, and all this time these men are calling out for me. Poor fellows! They are just like souls in purgatory if I am away from them for a moment."

CHAPTER XV.

"At last, my dear Emily, I have got rid of those men, who have been as charming as usual, and, if anything, rather more assiduous in their attentions than before. The Egyptian sun, doubtless, infuses warmth into their hearts, and I am not surprised, as it has exactly the same effect on me.

"To hark back—We left Marseilles eight days ago. We had a compartment reserved for us, in which I sat opposite to Madame de Guéran, whilst the painter, the literary man, and the doctor occupied the other seats. As for Joseph, he got into another carriage and, as he was no longer under our watchful eyes, could talk as largely as he pleased whilst discussing our and his own little affairs.

"By the time we reached Lyons the whole train knew who we were and where we were going, and called Joseph Mohammed Abd-el-Gazal, as long as your arm. I imagine, too, that he must have spoken particularly about me, and have expatiated upon my former travels, for, the moment I entered the refreshment-room, there was no end of whispering and pushing amongst the people there.

"Fortunately for me, these things do not

trouble me in the least. I accept resignedly the popularity which accrues to me through my numerous adventures.

"You know, my dear Emily, what people generally do who have to pass the night in a railway carriage—how each settles himself in his own particular seat, screws himself into the corner of it and hollows out a nest, as it were, undoes his travelling-rug, stretches himself out, or curls himself up, according to his taste, and, in short, makes all his arrangements for sleeping or musing, conformably to his temperament and his fancy.

"We were not due at Marseilles until eleven o'clock on the following morning, and we disposed ourselves accordingly; I, for my part, making myself as comfortable as I could, whilst paying due attention to the grace of my movements, and the dignified elegance of my attitude. I was anxious to give everybody an idea of what may be called the poetry of sleep. Only, my feet were in my way and embarrassed me; do what I would to pack myself up and shrink into the smallest possible space, I did not know where to put them. They hung over the seat by a foot and a half.

"I was at last just going to sleep, and I thought that my neighbours would do the same, when I became a witness of the following scene:—

"The doctor of the expedition, M. Delange, who was seated at the other end of the carriage, on the opposite side to me and in the corner, became suddenly restless and began to move

about just as a person does, who, after having for a long time tried to go to sleep, gives it up as a bad job. The noise he made, breaking upon the general silence, roused me from my drowsiness. I half-opened my eyes, and to my extreme discomfort, saw that the young doctor had got up from his seat and was coming towards mine. What on earth does he want, I thought. And I confess that I was considerably alarmed, although, lest I should wake my companions, I kept my nervousness to myself.

"All the same, I assure you, I was quite prepared to give my gentleman a warm reception, for, however flattering to one's vanity it may be to be kissed in one's sleep, I do not think that a railway carriage is at all a proper place for such demonstrations of admiration.

"However, when he came close to me, and I was quite prepared to give him a sounding box on the ears by way of manifesting my displeasure, M. Delange stopped, reached up to the netting, and took therefrom his carpet bag.

"So I had only my own sensitiveness to blame, and, however I may have flattered myself as to the power of my own fascinations, I was obliged in the end to confess to myself that the young doctor really wanted merely his carpet bag.

"He had scarcely resumed his seat when he put his bag on his knees and, after rummaging about in it for some moments, wound up by taking out a small packet, wrapped in white

paper, and looking at M. de Morin, who was seated opposite to him and at my feet.

"The dear painter was enjoying a sound, peaceful, and snoreless sleep—the sweet, silent slumber of a child or a woman. It was quite pleasant to see him given up so thoroughly to repose, and I should never have been cruel enough to awake him, but M. Delange, less considerate than I, suddenly seized M. de Morin by the arm and shook him impatiently.

"'What's the matter? What do you want? Are we there already?' said the painter, sitting up and opening his eyes, still heavy with sleep.

"'No, my dear fellow," replied M. Delange. 'We are very far from being there, especially if you mean Africa, for we are not more than three hours from Paris. It is exactly 10.48 p.m. We have just passed Tonnerre, and are going ahead full steam for Dijon!'

"'Well, then, why on earth did you wake me up?' said M. de Morin, crossly.

"'Why did I wake you up?' repeated M. Delange, with a smile on his face. 'How about our contract?'

"'What contract?'

"'What! You have forgotten it already? I'll recall it to your mind. Art. 4—It is understood between the contracting parties that, on each day during the voyage, without any exception unless in case of sickness, a *partie* at cards shall be played by MM. de Morin and Delange—we have been hours on our voyage; you are

not ill—to that, in my capacity of doctor, I certify—and I am, therefore, in a position to exact the fulfilment of the contract.'

"'In a railway carriage?' exclaimed M. de Morin, in a tone of incredulity.

"'No place is excepted,' observed the doctor, with his calmest manner. 'Will you kindly remember that another article of this contract gives me, and you also, the right of deciding that the *partie* shall come off even in the middle of a river, with one's feet in the water, or on the top of a mountain, with one's head in the clouds. Our present situation is rather more convenient than either of those, and there is no obstacle whatever—'

"'Except that we have no cards,' interrupted the painter.

"'I took good care to provide myself with two packs,' said M. Delange, as he tore the cover off the small packet which he had taken out of his carpet bag.

"'But we cannot play on our knees,' remonstrated M. de Morin, making one more effort at resistance.

"'The seat will do very well for a card-table.'

"'But there is not light enough.'

"'I have provided for that,' replied the Doctor, as he took hold of his carpet bag once more, and produced a small lantern, placing it on the arm which separated the seats.

"'Come along, then!' said M. de Morin, making a virtue of necessity. 'You have an

answer to every objection, but deuce take me, if I thought of being called upon to-day!'

"'For my part,' replied the Doctor, 'I have been, for the last six weeks, awaiting this moment with a feverish impatience. Only think for an instant! I have never, in the whole course of my life, been so long without playing, and if this species of privation had gone on much longer I should have been taken ill.'

"'You are incorrigible,' said M. de Morin, laughing. 'In my innocence, I said to myself, he has forgotten our contract, and he is undertaking this journey for the mere pleasure of travelling.'

"'So I am, but that does not hinder us from playing cards for an hour or two each day.'

"'All right. What is the game to be? You are the loser, and so have your choice.'

"'Ecarté, if you have no objection.'

"'I have no voice in the matter,' exclaimed the painter, with an air of resignation. 'In accordance with our contract I am your slave, so écarté be it. One game for a thousand francs, is it not? I want to take up my dream, as soon as possible, where I left it.'

"'Sorry to contradict you. We will play for five louis the trick only, so that the pleasure may last the longer.'

"Be it so, but, still in accordance with our contract, we are only to play one *partie* a day. It is now eleven o'clock at night, and you have

consequently only one hour before you in which to win or lose your fifty louis.'

"'I know it, so let us begin."

"From my corner, my dear Emily, I heard every word of this strange conversation, but I must confess that I did not understand much of it. The pair began to play, and I paid no more attention to them, preferring to go to sleep."

CHAPTER XVI.

"At Valence, about 7 a.m., at the announcement by the porters that the train would stop for four minutes, the whole carriage full yawned, stretched themselves, passed their hands over their eyes, hair, and moustaches, made a kind of cursory toilet, and at last woke up completely. The windows were let down, and a miniature southern sun, the timid precursor of the burning rays of Africa, infused a little warmth into us.

"It was only after having had a good look at, and recognized each other, and said good-morning, that we began to chat. On the previous evening, weariness and want of spirits had prevented our being very communicative, but, now, as soon as the power of speech had come back to us, I asked MM. de Morin and Delange for some information as to their game at écarté. They had no idea that I was fully aware of all their doings and sayings, and they laughingly told me that the result of the play was in favour of the doctor.

"'A thousand francs?' said I. 'And did you leave off at midnight?'

"'Yes, but how—'

"'In my corner I heard all that passed, but

when you spoke of a contract which you were bound to fulfil I allow that I did not understand you.'

"'We will soon unravel that mystery,' said M. de Morin, 'and the more so because this is not the last time we shall play. We shall do it every day, and it would be too bad to puzzle you any longer.'

"And with a grace of manner which is quite natural to him, the young painter gave me a detailed account of his agreement with M. Delange. I saw at once that the latter is a gambler at heart, and, as I do not like that, he has fallen in my esteem. It is not that I am very particular, for, as you know full well, my dear Emily, I have seen so much of the world and its lights and shades, and so many crimes have been perpetrated under my very eyes in this dear Africa, whither I am returning entirely of my own free will, that I am naturally inclined to err on the side of indulgence, and to place a love of play in the category of minor offences. But, as a woman, I have a grudge against M. Delange, seeing that he might very well dispense with his gambling whilst in our society. Madame de Guéran and I are sufficiently engaging, and we have attractions enough, both intellectual and physical, to make it easy for him to sacrifice his love for cards. By-and-bye I may forgive him, but at this present moment both his friends occupy a higher place than he does in my esteem.

"I really have not anything to say about our

stay in Marseilles, because nothing of importance happened there. We only spent one whole day in the place, Saturday, and on Sunday, at 9 a.m., we embarked on board one of the magnificent steamers belonging to the *Messageries Maritime*, which plies to India and China.

"Neither have I anything to tell you of our trip across. Amongst the passengers were a number of our fellow-countrymen, on their way to Calcutta and Singapore, some Dutch going to Java, and a great many French, principally from Marseilles, with whom Mohammed-Abd-el-Gazal got on famously.

"We reached Naples in about forty hours, and three days afterwards landed in Egypt. The weather throughout was magnificent, and the Mediterranean as calm as the Thames. We, all of us, were wonderfully well except the faithful Joseph, who, as he did not deny himself anything, fell a victim to sea-sickness. How did he contrive to be ill, if the sea was so calm? you will ask. I really do not know; his ways are not our ways. If only he would have conducted his sickness in a discreet and poetical manner, as I have myself often done, and wholesale, too! But no—his sickness was of the most intrusive and prosaic character. My dear Emily, these common people cannot do anything gracefully, whereas an English girl who has been well brought up, on the contrary, elevates even the most trivial things.

"The trip to me, indeed, was simply enchant-

ing. I gazed once more on the clear, blue sky, without which I can no longer exist. Africa knew me again, and overflowing with loving care, wafted me her sweetest odours. At length I was no longer shut up in a box, as I had been in Paris and Marseilles; I could tread the deck from stem to stern. My feet were carried away with delight, and walked—oh! how they walked! According to the calculations of M. Périères, who made a regular study of me, and, every now and then, without my knowing it, fastened a pedometer to my back, I walked about forty miles a day, from end to end of the ship.

"Very often, even at night, when the heavens were studded with twinkling stars, I resumed my walk after supper. The passengers who had betaken themselves to their cabins and wished to sleep, complained more than a little of the noise I made over their heads. But that did not affect me in the least; I am above all those petty considerations, and the deck is open to all the world. One evening, however, as I was walking, from choice, on the poop, I heard, just as I was over one of the starboard cabins, a voice immediately beneath me. 'Oho!' thought I to myself, 'here we have a fractious kind of sleeper. Wait a bit, my friend, and I'll teach you to knock like that and try to impose silence on a British female!' And with that, instead of going farther away, I began to stamp above that ill-advised cabin.

"'What are you doing, Miss Beatrice?' said M. Périères, as he joined me. 'You are right

on the top of Madame de Guéran's cabin. She recognized you by the airy lightness of your step, and knocked to ask you to go down and speak to her.'

"I was rather taken aback, but I put an end to my promenade, went down to the Baroness, and had a conversation with her which gave me food for much reflection.

"'I beg your pardon, Miss Poles,' said Madame de Guéran, 'for having interrupted your nocturnal walk, but I thought you would not mind giving me a few moments of your time.'

"'Certainly, madame. I am entirely at your orders,' I hastened to reply. 'It was you, then, whose sleep I was disturbing?'

"'You would most assuredly have disturbed it,' said the Baroness, laughing, 'if I had had the slightest inclination that way; but I am very much preoccupied, and that has kept me awake. Tell me,' she continued brusquely, 'you, who, like myself, have been brought into contact with so many travellers, have you not noticed how very easily all sorts of rumours gain credence about them in Europe? Amongst other things, do you remember what was said about Edward Vögel?'

"'No,' I replied, 'for once my really marvellous memory is at fault.'

"'Well,' continued the Baroness, 'I have collected, on purpose to show them to you, a series of papers relating to that celebrated traveller, who was one of my father's firmest

friends. I can only now, as you may imagine, give you the gist of them. On the 14th December, 1857, the English Vice-Consul at Khartoum, Mr. Green, gave his Government the following information. * Dr. Vögel, after reaching the Waday territory, was at first very well received by the Sultan. But in the outskirts of Warra there is a holy mountain, the ascent of which is forbidden to the whole world. This mountain Vögel attempted to ascend, and he was at once arrested and put to death.'

"'You see,' said the Baroness, handing me an English newspaper, 'that the news is quite official, and Lord Clarendon informed his Queen of it. But, on the 29th of June, 1860, another account, equally official, was sent to the Humboldt Institution.'

"'What do you say to these two versions?' asked Madame le Guéran.

"'If they do not exactly coincide,' I replied, 'in all their details, they at all events both end after the same fashion.'

"'But there is still a third version, to which in England great importance has been attached

* Vögel, on arriving at Bomon, was anxious to secure the protection of somebody of influence, and he was recommended to apply to the Vizier Germa, a cousin of the Sultan. Scarcely had he been presented to this individual than the latter requested the gift of Vögel's horse, a very valuable animal. Vögel refused, and his death was at once resolved upon. He was accused of having entered the country for the purpose of bewitching it, and of writing with a pen without ink (a pencil, in reality), and on the fifth day after his arrival Germa made an appearance before his house, accompanied by an armed escort, Vögel was summoned to come out, under the pretext that the Sultan had asked for him, and he fell under the blows of these murderers.

for some considerable time, and according to it Vögel is simply a prisoner in Bomon. An expedition has even set out in search of him.'

"'All the same, his death is very plainly proved.'

"'I agree with you, but you must remember that the existence of Livingstone has just been established, and for him we have already worn mourning two or three times, and each time in consequence of reports worthy of all credence.'

"'To what does all this tend?' asked I.

"She looked at me, did not answer a single word, and, a few moments afterwards, without deigning to explain herself more fully, allowed me to retire.

"I resumed my walk on deck, so that I might reflect on the singular interview in which I had just borne a part."

CHAPTER XVII.

M. DE POMMERELLE, one of the most popular members of that club where the momentous game of baccarat, which we have already described, took place, seized the opportunity of delivering himself to his three friends, M. de Morin, Périères, and Delange, on the evening before their departure, in something like the following terms—

"My dear friends, I adore travels, I burn to accept your invitation to follow you to Africa, and I would give my whole fortune, as well as the contents of the public exchequer, especially the latter, to pay a visit in your society to those marvellous regions which you are going to traverse. And nothing would be easier for me than to accompany you. I am a bachelor and an orphan, and though I have a few relatives, scattered here and there about the left bank of the Seine, from the Esplanade des Invalides to the Rue du Bac, they are such utter strangers to me that I do not care one jot about them. Friends I have none, except yourselves. I have no incumbrances whatever, and my private income is ample enough to allow of my following you and giving myself up, without the slightest risk of ruin, to any amount of African

dissipation. But, notwithstanding all this, I am not going with you. And now for my reasons—

"I am Parisian to the back-bone, and as thoroughly a man about town as it is possible for any human being to be. I had scarcely left Paris, last summer, to go to Trouville, at my doctor's suggestion, for fear of cholera, indeed I had not got beyond Maison-Lafitte, before I was tempted to take a return train. By the time I reached Nantes I was restless and uneasy, and I would have given anything if I could have set eyes on the steps of Tortoni's. At Elbeuf I was a prey to the deepest dejection, and everybody else in the carriage seemed to be similarly affected. You would have thought it was a mourning coach, bringing back from the cemetery a cargo of rightful heirs disinherited by the defunct. At Serquigny the refreshment-room failed to charm. I absolutely refused to go into it. I did not want anything and, if I had, I could not have taken it, for my stomach was as dejected as my heart. The sight of the pastures of Liseaux and the cattle grazing on the plain gave fresh impulse to my melancholy. The silence, the calm, the repose of nature affected my nerves, and my agitation became extreme. My fellow passengers grew uneasy and huddled together in alarm. When I arrived at Trouville, I rushed into my room at the hotel, closed the shutters so that I might not catch sight of the sea, and burst into a flood of tears. I need scarcely tell you that on the following

morning I left for Paris by the first train, and that I told the cholera it might seize on me, do whatever it liked with me, on condition that it did not banish me from Paris.

"Say what you like, my dear fellows, I simply cannot do without those wretched Boulevards, which commence at the Madeleine and end just before you come to the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre. They are dusty, dirty, smoky—I admit all that. In the summer my boots are incrusted with the asphalte which melts under my feet. In the winter I flounder about in a mass of sticky mud, which is at the same time as slippery as ice. At all seasons of the year the gas lamps shed around their sickly light. The trees weep in vain for leaves, but I have been accustomed ever since my birth and theirs to the sight of their trunks alone, and I should be annoyed if they afforded any shade, for then they would not be my trees.

"From noon to 1 a.m. I cannot get away from the sight of those miserable little kiosques where so much silliness goes on, nor from the theatres in which, for the last twenty years, the same actresses have acted the same pieces, nor from those picturesque hired carriages, closed in summer and open in winter, whose horses care as much for their drivers as the drivers do for us. I am bound to jostle and be jostled by the same loungers, male and female, the same poor, the same rich, always the same, beggars, bohemians, men who have, men who have had, and men who never had a name, virtue and vice,

honour and disgrace; rags and ermine brush past me in turn, and in turn I take off my hat to the tip-tilted nose, or the modest eyes so bashfully cast down, or the bald-headed ancient. I must shake hands warmly with jolly Mrs. This, or just touch the tips of Miss That's delicate fingers; I must inhale the noisome vapours which steam out of the half-open *café*, and the delicious essence of verbena which ever hangs around the footsteps of the Countess X. In a word, these elbowings to and fro, the bow given or received, the 'how d'ye do?' to one, and 'very well, thank you,' to another, the crowd, the smells, the lights, this life itself—all, all are indispensable to me, and away from them I should droop, and wither, and die.

"And yet, I repeat, I adore travels, in all probability because I have never done any travelling. The New Library in the Boulevard des Italiens never sees any one but me. Achille Heymann and Ménard, those intelligent *employés* at Lévy's, send me, by the cart load, volume upon volume of the adventures of every traveller, known or unknown. An author need only go a hundred leagues from Paris to secure a place in my esteem. I read him attentively, I admire and I revere him. In short, within the walls of my own room I am one of the most remarkable travellers the world ever saw.

"You have now heard my confession, and have by this time learnt, first of all, that you will have to do without me, and, secondly, that you can do me a great service, by giving me a

full, true, and particular description of every country through which you pass, by jotting down for me all sorts of information and all kinds of random notes. I shall enter thoroughly into the spirit of your letters, study them, learn them by heart; I shall travel in thought with you, and I will bless you for the pleasant half hours I know you will have in store for me.

"You need not say a word about yourselves, my dear fellows. The fact of your writing to me will be a proof positive that you are well, and that is all I care about, as far as you are concerned. No, I shall like you ever so much better if you will introduce me to the negroes and negresses, the he-savages and she-savages of your acquaintance. I have spoken. Do you swear to do as I ask you?"

And, like the three Horatii, they raised their hands on high and sware.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On the 25th October, 1872, M. de Pommerelle, on reaching his rooms at 3 a.m., found on his bedroom mantel-piece a letter, with the Cairo post-mark.

"Those dear boys!" he exclaimed, gleefully. "They have not forgotten me." And in spite of the late, or rather, early hour, and the fact that he was tired, he lighted a couple of candles so that he might more readily peruse his precious letter without losing a word of it. He very soon saw, from the variations in the handwriting, that the three travellers had worked together in his behalf. M. de Morin opened the ball.

"Ah! my dear de Pommerelle," commenced this epistle, "what a voyage! what an ecstatic voyage!"

M. de Pommerelle put the letter down and rubbed his hands. His imagination went far ahead of his eyesight, and he revelled beforehand in the landscapes about to be unfolded to his view, and the descriptions of manners and customs into which he was to be initiated. He took the letter up again, and found that it went on in the following strain—

"Yes, a delicious voyage! Madame de Guéran is simply adorable. You cannot have

an idea of how quickly the time passes in her society. It is now ten days since I left Paris, and it seems but yesterday. Her charm! her exquisite refinement! her gaiety, tempered with an irresistible shade of melancholy! her even temperament! her conversation, at once full of wit and wisdom!"

"When will he have done with all this?" exclaimed M. de Pommerelle, who was becoming impatient over this rhapsody. "The least possible description of Africa would please me far more than any portrait of Madame de Guéran. However, let us see, perhaps he has nearly done, and will continue in another strain."

M. de Morin's letter went on thus—

"And how she exacts obedience from all! If you could only see her ordering about these people whom we have already got together for the expedition!"

"The expedition! Bravo!" said M. de Pommerelle. "Now we have it. It was just about time, I think; but oh! these lovers!"

"The inhabitants of Cairo," resumed the letter, "would not admit that Madame de Guéran is an European. She carries, so they say, her head too high, her movements are too graceful, and her whole appearance too independent. And, besides that, the fanciful garb, fashioned in Paris, but now worn for the first time, becomes her figure so marvellously! It is like nothing else. It is neither Parisian nor Turkish, neither dress nor costume, stamped

with an originality of its own, and yet not in the least theatrical. However, when I have said that she invented and designed it herself, I have said all. Add to this that she speaks the true Arabic, and by that I mean high-class Arabic, and you will readily understand that the country people, or fellahs, as they are called, worship her and take her for a sultana. So amongst ourselves we have dubbed her with that title. 'The sultana has come to such and such a conclusion,' Périères will say. Or the Doctor will be heard to remark, 'The sultana is leaving her room.' In my opinion this designation but imperfectly describes her. There is something of the sultana about her, I admit, but there is more of the Parisian. Her wit is keen and original, and there is a certain piquancy about her countenance. And, moreover, there is not a Turkish female in this world who possess the *chic* you meet with in a French woman. So, to please all parties, and to bring Europe and Africa together, I proposed to style Madame de Guéran the 'Parisian Sultana,' and the motion was carried.

"Miss Beatrice Poles, of whom I have already made mention to you, would have preferred the 'Flame-Queen,' that being the *soubriquet* bestowed on Mdlle. Alexina Tinne by the tribes of the Upper Nile, when they saw the showers of sparks emitted from the funnel of her steam-launch as she descended the river. But we are not quite sure of the steamer, and, in addition to that, we have no idea of dressing

our beloved Baroness up in styles and titles borrowed from the Dutch lady traveller. Madame de Guéran deserves a lavish expenditure of imagination all to herself.

"*Apropos* of Miss Beatrice Poles, I must tell you something that will amuse you. But Madame de Guéran has sent for me—excuse me for a moment—I shall not be long."

"He is quite welcome to stay away altogether," exclaimed M. de Pommerelle in a rage. "What do I care for Miss Poles and Madame de Guéran, and all their trivialities? Africa alone has any interest for me, and Africa is conspicuous by its absence."

Nevertheless, impelled by curiosity, and relying on the promise made to him, he resumed his reading.

"You knew Miss Beatrice Poles," continued M. de Morin. "I pointed that female phenomenon out to you one day when we were smoking a cigar in the balcony at the club. She was, you will remember, plunging along the pavement right in front of you at a prodigious rate, for all the world like an express train under full steam. She banged through the various groups of people, however compact they were, with a dig in the ribs to the right, and a resolute shove to the left. She would inevitably have upset every obstacle in her path, had not the children taken to flight, the women squeezed themselves against the houses, and the men taken refuge in the gutter. As the rapidity of her movements prevented your distinguishing her

features, I showed you her portrait, which was not overdone in the least particular, I assure you. Nothing was due to any invention—neither the leanness, nor the length, nor the arms, nor the hands, nor the feet, nor the enormous blue spectacles.

"Well, just picture to yourself that this elegant creature believes that Périères, Delange, and myself are in love, over head and ears in love with her. And we are unmerciful enough (one must amuse oneself on board ship) to humour her in that hallucination. I overwhelm her with compliments, and all kinds of delicate attractions; Delange is every moment bestowing on her the most amorous glances, and Périères sighs to such an extent that he might very well pass for a love-sick locomotive. The heart of Miss Beatrice Poles fluctuates between all three of us, and we shall let it do so—to fix it on one of us would be rather too dangerous.

"Apart from her delusion in believing herself young, lovely, and ardently beloved, she is an excellent woman, intelligent, even amusing where she herself is not concerned, an invaluable adviser, courageous, untiring, and exemplary in every way.

"I am sorry to say that I cannot give my servant Joseph such a good character. He is a regular stupid! Imagine his having, instead of putting Joseph on his baggage, which was sent on in advance to Egypt, labelled it Mohammed-Abd-el-Gazal, a fancy name of his own creation, which he has thought proper to

adopt. What was the result? At Suez a real Mohammed, for the name is the commonest possible in these parts, claimed Joseph's baggage as if it belonged to him. With that Egyptian mixture of carelessness and knavery, of which we have already had frequently to complain, the baggage was handed over to this claimant, and no doubt by this time it is in the desert.

"Needless to say that it would have been absurd to pay any attention to the lamentations of Joseph, or to make any representations to the police. We called to mind the saying, now almost historical—'The day which witnesses, in Egypt, the recovery of a stolen pocket-handkerchief will see also the settlement of the Eastern Question.' But I am conscious, my dear friend, that I am not carrying out your instructions, for, instead of holding forth about Africa, as you wished, I have simply talked of ourselves, and that you do not care about. You will lose nothing by it. I yield the pen to Périères—he is a literary man—he is! He excels in description. You shall be satisfied."

"And high time, too," said M. de Pommerelle to himself. "Now I shall hear something about Egypt, and something worth hearing into the bargain. I know Périères—he is a remarkably descriptive writer—as good as Gautier."

He hastened to take the second sheet, and this is what he found there—

"Paris, departure, express, 7.15 p.m. Marseilles, arrival, 11.40 a.m. Grand Hôtel, Noailles—luggage. Walk round town. Tues-

day left 9 a.m, steamer. Calm sea. Thursday, Naples, Pretty bay; Vesuvius not smoking. Friday, Port Saïd, very ugly. Left railway. Arrived—Cairo. Picturesque, but no Almehs. Arrange caravan. Kind regards."

"The wretch!" exclaimed M. de Pommerelle, indignantly, "and he calls himself a writer! And this is what literature has come to now-a-days! If you don't pay these gentlemen for their copy, they use the telegraph wire for a pen. And I compared this fellow Périères with that painter of the East, the great Gautier! I shall never forgive myself for it."

He got up in despair, and was pacing up and down his room, when, on passing the mantelpiece, where he had thrown down the letters, his eye suddenly caught sight of another page, written in a small and hurried hand. It was Dr. Delange's contribution.

"At last!" exclaimed he, "I am sure to find some pithy remarks about Egypt here—those doctors are such intelligent observers!"

He read as follows:—

"You were a witness, my dear de Pommerelle, of my tortures during the last month of my stay in Paris. Every night I went to the Club. I sat down at the baccarat table, and, obedient to the promise I had given, I contented myself with looking without touching, just as they do in the Public Museums. But, what I suffered! Good Heavens, what I went through! I had but one thought, one dream—to play with de Morin, in accordance with the contract we told

you about, and which you thought so original. I won my first fifty louis at ecarté. De Morin, as the loser, had, consequently, the right on the following day of naming the game. He chose lansquenet, and made his fifty louis at a single *coup*. To play for two seconds only when we had the whole day before us! It was not right, and I had not reckoned on anything of that sort, so I thought I would give my adversary a lesson. We were on board the steamer, and, as I had lost on the previous evening, I was master of the situation. 'This way, if you please,' said I to my friend, and he had nothing to do but obey.

"I took him on deck, about amidships—a few paces from the funnel. The heat was tremendous, and up the hatchway, by the engine-room, came whiffs of stifling foul air, and the almost insupportable stench of hot oil. Then I quietly took the cards out of my pocket, and said—'Play away!'

"Morin made a grimace, but the treaty was all the more binding, because we had burnt it and stood on our word of honour—so he had to submit.

"We played at Chinese bezique, at a sou a point, for eight mortal hours. I was regularly done, but so was my adversary, and, to pile up his agony, he lost his thousand francs.

"On the following day the opportunity of taking his revenge was not to be lost. I was walking on the poop, when he came up to me and said smilingly, and in his most dulcet tones—

"'Our contract allows us, you know, to substitute a bet for cards.'

"'I know it,' said I, not seeing his drift.

"'Very well, then,' continued de Morin, in the same gracious tone, 'I take advantage of the choice, and I'll bet you that you do not jump into the sea now at once in my presence.'

"'I'll bet you I do,' I replied.

"'A thousand francs on it,' said de Morin.

"'Done!' said I.

"I lighted a cigar very quietly, and stretched myself on a seat.

"'Holloa!' cried my adversary, 'what are you doing?'

"'Resting, you perceive.'

"'And the bet?'

"'Well; I've lost it.'

"'Then why did you take it?'

"'To lose, and take my revenge to-morrow.'

"De Morin groaned, for he saw, by the look on my face, that I was to be feared. The next day we entered the Bay of Naples, and the weather was perfect. De Morin was standing up, leaning against one of the shrouds, telescope in hand, and contemplating, with evident enjoyment, the magnificent panorama which was unrolling itself before his eyes. The unhappy man turned his head, changed colour, and, at the given sign, followed me. But when he saw me wending my way towards the companion-ladder, which led to between-decks, when it became evident that, regardless of the lovely weather, the blue sky, and the splendid view, I

was going to make him descend into the depths of the hold, to bury him in those submarine catacombs, he begged for mercy, and proposed an arrangement.

"I condescended to listen to him, and it was there and then agreed upon between us that if I did not insist on too prolonged *parties*, he on his side, would not cut them too short. So we have agreed to play for two hours each day.

"*Au revoir*, my dear fellow. De Morin is waiting for me to have a real good game at piquet."

"Well!" exclaimed de Pommerelle, "these three letters have given me an admirable idea of Africa!"

By way of calming his agitation, he took up a pen, and, in his turn, indited the following telegram :—

"If you, false friends, do not keep your promise, I will not send any more cigars, and you will die of despair for want of a smoke.

"POMMERELLE."

CHAPTER XIX.

FROM M. PÉRIÈRES TO M. DE POMMERELLE.

"Even for a man habitually unjust, you are the most unjust man I know. Our two friends chat to you in the most genial manner possible about all their little affairs; in your society they rest from the cares of the voyage; they do their best to forget their annoyances, and, I may as well confess it, a certain amount of apprehension, which the very bravest of us cannot help experiencing when on the eve of what very probably may turn out to be a series of hazardous adventures. They turn their eyes from the horizon, where already ominous dark clouds are gathering, sit themselves down in spirit once more in your smoking-room, in the very heart of Paris, and, whilst chatting of this, that, and the other, imagine themselves, for the moment, to be there in reality.

"As far as I am concerned, I reasoned with myself that, if you had never travelled, you had read quite enough to make any account of Lyons, Marseilles, Alexandria and Cairo stale news to you, and so, instead of sending you a hash, made up of old scraps, I gave you a *resumé* of the trip, after the African manner, in order to accustom myself to that facetious style.

"You neither appreciated this delicate attention on my part, nor made any allowances for the exigences of the case as regarded de Morin and Delange. In your inconsiderate way, you snatch up a pen, and hurl the most terrible threats against three poor devils who are about to offer up their lives as a sacrifice to science and geography.

"But, most inexorable of tyrants, you have us in your power. We cannot do without cigars, and so we surrender at discretion.

"Do you know, first of all, where I am at this present moment? I am neither in a hotel, nor in a room, nor under a tent, nor on land, nor on the Nile. I am out at sea—the Red one, on board a steamer belonging to the Medschidieh Company of Egypt, and am on my way to Souakim, a port of some importance, situated midway between Suez and Aden, on the west coast, that is to say, on the same side as Egypt and Nubia. I trust that you will, at all events do me the honour of following me on the map. Get the one by Brué—it is about the best, though it leaves much to be desired. The German map of Stieler, of Gotha, '*Mittel und nord Africa* (*ostlicher theil*)', which, being interpreted, is, 'Nothern and Central Africa (eastern portion),' is far more complete, but you would lose yourself amongst all the German names. It requires a certain amount of skill to understand the French maps, whereon the names of towns, tribes, villages, rivers and mountains are inscribed in half-a-dozen different ways.

Sometimes, even, there is not the slightest resemblance between two names given to the same place. For instance, the town of Berber, where we shall once more join the Nile, is called on some maps, El-Mecheref. If you can recognise Berber under that name, you are far cleverer than I am.

"But I am wandering. I was telling you that we were proceeding by sea towards Souakim, whence we shall go by land to Berber, and then up the Nile by Chendy, as far as Khartoum. Why, you will ask, did we select that route? For many reasons, but principally because it is the shortest, and offers great advantages in the way of security. In a week at the most, we may expect, in spite of having to call in at several places on the coast, to be at the first-named port. We shall there be within two or three degrees of the latitude of Khartoum. We shall thus have accomplished in eight days, a distance which, even in good seasons, takes at least six weeks, sometimes even two months, if the journey is made by steamer up the Nile.

"But, you will say, you will have to get from Souakim to Berber before you can talk of Khartoum. You are quite right; but the distance from the sea to the Nile is only about two hundred miles, which we shall do on camels, and it will serve to season us. We shall also have to cross several ranges where the air is most salubrious, and, consequently, we shall reach Berber in good condition, in capital train-

ing, as Madame de Guéran would say, and able, by means of these gradual transitions, to stand the heat of Central Africa. That portion of the Nile which we shall have to navigate between Berber and Khartoum is exceedingly interesting, and we shall have the opportunity, not given to all the world, and least of all to you, of gazing upon the famous Pyramids of Meröe and the sixth great cataract. We, you see, commence with the sixth; we suppress the first five; it is a way we have. This part of our journey will occupy fifteen days at the outside, perhaps only eight, if we have the wind with us.

"We shall thus set aside all the wonders of the Egyptian Nile—Siout, the mountains of the Libyan chain, ancient Thebes, Luxor, Karnak, and the island of Philœ. But, then, so many travellers have descanted on these celebrated spots! Let me recommend you to read the 'Valley of the Nile,' a very notable work by Henri Cammas and Andre Lefèvre.

"Excuse me for a moment. The awning over the poop, under which I am now writing, does not shelter me sufficiently from the heat. I am stifled, and I am going to disport myself in a huge tub in the forepart of the ship. If, after that, I feel better, I will take up my pen once more when the sun goes down."

* * * * *

"It was a capital idea of mine to leave you to yourself. My affection for the cold water system has brought me a slice of good luck, for

I have just seen—but I am heading the fox. After emerging from my tub, I was just putting the finishing touches to my toilet, when it seemed to me that I heard a sigh, a sort of plaintive breathing, or, rather, the long drawn-out respiration of a woman who is just awaking out of sleep and giving a good stretch. What did it mean? The three female Nubian attendants, whom Madame de Guéran hired at Cairo, sleep below there, near the engine—I can see them now. The Baroness herself, reclining on the poop, is chatting with our companions, and there are no other women on board. Is Africa already exercising a misleading influence over me? Have I come to such a pass that I cannot distinguish between a woman's sigh and the grunt of an able-bodied seaman? Impossible—for a time, at all events, I am in full possession of all my faculties.

"Another sigh. This time I am not mistaken. It came from close to and below me, so that the hold must be inhabited.

"I stoop down, put my ear close to the deck, and listen. Yes, the same sighs, the same gentle breathing, with something about it very sweet and plaintive. I must find out the key to the enigma!

"I look before me and behind me. I seek some opening, some hatchway which will lead from this part of the vessel into the hold. Not a hole of any kind. I see only, a few paces distant, the large hatchway, 18 feet square, opening into the main hold, but the hatches, over

which huge tarpaulins are spread, are down, and an entrance by that way is impossible.

"And yet, that there are living souls in that cavern beneath my feet is beyond a doubt. How on earth do they breathe? By the port-holes in the sides of the ship, of course, and I never noticed them when I came on board.

"Now for it. Let me examine the outside of the steamer. It is an exercise worthy of the leading spirit of a Gymnastic Society. Nobody sees me. All the sailors, the Captain included, are either snoozing or sound asleep; the engineers and stokers, half-suffocated in their oven, are not thinking of me, and my friends are watching the sunset. Besides, the screen hung up to hide our *al fresco* bath-room, will hide my movements too.

"In two bounds I was over the netting—I seized hold of a rope, swung myself under the bowsprit, and cast a rapid glance over the sides of the ship. I was right. Two small port-holes were open on each side of me, and from them had escaped the sighs which had reached my ears.

"With my hands I clung to the gunwale of the ship, crept round to the right towards the nearest port-hole, let go of the gunwale in order to grasp a rope which I had taken care to fasten round the capstan, let myself down about a yard, and put my head into the open port-hole.

"Ah! my dear fellow, if you could only have seen the sight that greeted my inquisitive eyes ——."

CHAPTER XX.

"At first, it is true, I did not see much. My head shut out the day-light, and kept everything in shadow. But, after a moment, my eyes became accustomed to the gloom; through the intervals between the port-hole and my head came the rays of light, and I saw—what? Can you guess? Do you give it up? Of course you do, for who could have supposed——?

"I saw a small space, about five yards by three, right in the centre of the hold. The vessel was not fully laden, and an attempt had evidently been made to utilise the unoccupied space above the cargo, large mats and cloths of brilliant colours having been spread out in order to hide the packages. In the centre of this hastily-improvised and utterly unfurnished cabin, four women lay dozing or asleep, all in different postures. One, lying on her back, with her arms crossed behind her, had made a species of pillow of her hands, which were clasped under the nape of her neck. Another, by way of contrast, was lying at full length, face downwards, on her mat, which served her as a couch. The third, squatting rather than sitting, had placed her elbows on her knees, and had buried

her head in her hands. The last, lying at full length, but on her side, slept with her face completely hidden on her bent arm. In these positions the four beings seemed only one and the same woman, whose varied attitudes were reflected in skilfully-disposed mirrors.

"One and all were beautifully-proportioned, and might have served as models for the most celebrated of ancient sculpture. Their long, silky hair, of a deep, rich, black-brown tint, shone, and seemed to grow purple in the golden rays of the setting sun. The velvety texture of their skin is beyond my powers of description, but it recalled to my mind the sheen of those bronzes of which Florence possessed the secret in days gone by, a species of molten metal—brown steel with golden lights in it.

"I could only distinguish the features of one of these women. Her nose was perfectly straight, with strongly defined nostrils; her forehead, rather narrow and receding, was, nevertheless, smooth and without a line on it, the forehead of a girl of fifteen. Sweeping eye-lashes, of the same tint as her hair, veiled her almond-shaped eyes, and between the pouting, carmine lips, I could see her small and pearl-white teeth.

"I have dwelt at some length on this description; but you will scarcely wonder, if you think for a moment of my own position all this time, that the scene is impressed vividly on my recollection. Round one of my arms was wound a rope which my right hand grasped with all its

force, with my other hand I laid hold, as best I could, of the ship's side, and my feet were hanging in empty space. My head was stuck in the port-hole, just as in the lunette of a guillotine, and, seen from within, I must have looked as if I had parted with the rest of my body.

"So one of these women evidently thought, the one who was merely dozing, and whose plaintive sighs had attracted my attention and led to my gymnastic exercises. She was the young girl whose face I had been admiring. Her sweeping eye-lashes parted gradually, first I saw a little white, then a little black, and at last the eyes opened, their look hovered round the empty space, and suddenly catching sight of me, shot out a glance like lightning. At the same time, she uttered a cry, and, with a single bound, with a velocity simply marvellous, but fully accounted for later on, she sprang to her feet.

"The cry aroused the other three sleepers. With the same elasticity that their companion had displayed they bounded to their feet, and all four, in a heap, took refuge in the remotest corner of the cabin. Thus huddled together, startled and trembling, they formed one single group.

"Even now, as I write, my imagination recalls the scene and these four beings, but neither in their attitude, nor in their look could I discover a clue to the feelings which agitated them. They did not seem to have any sense of

outraged modesty, but merely a species of scare at being thus so unexpectedly taken by surprise, and very natural alarm at the sudden appearance of the head of an apparently decapitated male.

"But I can assure you that none of these reflections passed across my mind at the time. Scarcely had my four unknowns cried out and huddled together, as I have already told you, then I began to think of retreat. It was high time, for my arms and hands were beginning to fail me, and the Red Sea, hankering after an infidel like me, was yawning for its prey.

"However, this was not exactly the moment wherein to give up the ghost. I had a mystery to unravel. What were these women doing on board the ship? Whence came they? I was, I confess, deeply interested, but, nevertheless, as you have perceived, I went on to the poop again to add a few words to my letter, and I did not leave you until night-fall. It is true that only then could I hope to get speech of the Captain, as that individual is all day long in a sort of stupor, caused by heat and tobacco, and possibly a little brandy mixed therewith, and as a rule does not condescend to emerge from his inaction until sunset.

"I joined him on the bridge whence he issues his despotic commands, and said—

"'I believe, Captain, that you have no right to take any passengers on board this ship as far as Souakim, except my friends, myself, and our servants?'

"'Just so,' murmured the Captain, still half asleep.

"'Very well. Then you have broken through your agreement.'

"'How so? I—'

"'You have on board four female passengers unknown to us.'

"After a useless attempt at denial, he was obliged to give me a full, true, and particular account of the whole business, which I epitomize for your benefit.

"The four mysterious creatures are dancers. You possibly suspected as much when I mentioned the celerity of their movements, and the suppleness of their limbs. The famous Almehs of Egypt are thus suddenly brought before you. You have been labouring under the impression that the Captain had given a free passage to some runaways from Cairo, who were making for Khartoum, the usual refuge for that destitute tide, which for some time past has been ebbing towards upper Egypt. Well, you are wrong. These women have no connection whatever with the Almehs. I do not wish to say a single word against these latter creatures, whom I hope to bring to your notice some day, but they are palpably inferior to my unknowns, both in reputation, beauty, and the science of dancing.

"'I thought,' you will say, 'that Egypt had no dancers but the Almehs.'

"Quite so, but those of whom I speak are not natives of Egypt. They spring from India.

"'From India? Then, they are—'

"'Yes, my friend, the bayaderes—neither more nor less.'

"'Bayaderes returning from Egypt, and on passage through the Red Sea? I do not understand.'

"Then write to the Captain for an explanation. I have had to content myself with what he told me. His passengers are bayaderes; not those spurious dancing girls whom the waiters in any *café* in Bombay, Calcutta, or Singapore can induce to disport themselves before strangers for a guinea or so, but genuine bayaderes, brought up by the priests and nurtured in the temple. They had been to Europe in the suite of a Rajah, who died suddenly at Cairo, and they did not deem it prudent to continue their journey, more especially as their resources had disappeared with the Rajah. Our Captain had offered to take them back to their own country, but as his contract with us precluded him from taking other passengers, he exacted from them an engagement that they would not show themselves outside their little cell.

"'The unfortunate creatures would have been suffocated in that hole,' I exclaimed.

"'They feel the heat so little,' replied the Captain, 'that only yesterday they asked me for some extra wraps. Just consider, we are at this moment in 20 degrees north latitude, and they were born close to the equator. What

these dancing girls want is exercise and activity.'

"I began to reflect once more. Suppose I were to take a mean advantage of the situation —if in exchange for a little ease and liberty, these sweet creatures would consent to initiate me into the secret of their mysterious dances—if, not content with studying the customs of Africa, I might, whilst grazing the Asiatic coast, get an idea of the manners of India!

"I sounded the Captain on the subject. He remonstrated at once.

"'Bayaderes dance in public? It is not to be thought of. They belong to a religious sect.'

"'Captain,' said I, interrupting him, 'we may possibly shut our eyes to any little irregularity which you have committed in taking these passengers on board in defiance of your agreement with us, if, on your part, you will contrive to arrange this little entertainment, this novel spectacle for us. Think it over. In our religion we can enter into an arrangement with Heaven itself—surely you can do as much with the bayaderes.'

"My glowing account and my projected evening's entertainment made de Morin and Delange as excited as I was; but, of course, we could not do anything without the consent of Madame de Guéran, a consent which she was most graciously pleased to accord. She, however, declined to be present, not from any motives of prudery, but because, as she herself said, the presence of ladies generally acted as a

restraint in the case of such exhibitions. She, nevertheless, instructed us to inform the bayaderes that the deck of the vessel was as free to them as to ourselves.

"My arguments have prevailed with the Captain, and his passengers will dance for us to-night. I am off to see to the refreshments and the lights."

CHAPTER XXI.

"In order that you may thoroughly enter into the spirit of our little *fête*, my dear fellow, I must, in your behalf, remove some of the obscurity in which the bayaderes are shrouded.

"In Europe the most ridiculous ideas prevail about these priestesses of the dance, obtained chiefly from the tales of conscientious, but easily imposed-upon travellers. As a matter of fact, they have scarcely set foot in India before they make known to the inhabitants their wishes to see the famous dancing girls who have for so long excited their curiosity. A so-called cicerone, whose sole occupation really consists in providing a supply of the spurious article, hastens to introduce to the notice of the unsophisticated European a few women passably pretty, and tolerably well-made, who give themselves out to be bayaderes with the same facility as with us a man announces himself as a landed proprietor or a contributor to the newspapers.

"To the sound of a kind of tambourine and brazen cymbals, these ladies step forward, raise their arms in the air, indulge without any preface in a variety of those contortions of trunk and shoulders which are the fundamental

principle of all Oriental dances, and cast on their patron glances which they do their best to make appear ardent. He, on the contrary, quite insensible to all these manœuvres, gets rid of his visitors as quickly as possible, and on his return to Europe, exclaims, 'Don't believe in the bayadere—she is a regular sell.'

"The real fact is that he never had a glimpse of the genuine article, and it is quite a mistake to suppose that it is to be found in *cafés* or hotels, or to imagine that a bayadere is to be had for the asking. Just as poets are born, and not made, so you must absolutely be born a bayadere or resign all pretensions to the title.

"The origin of this race dates from the most remote antiquity. Amongst the countless Hindoo divinities to be found in our curiosity shops, you may have remarked a four-armed figure perched on an elephant. He is one of the eight gods of Brahminism; he is called Indra and, according to the legend, the bayaderes, or celestial dancing girls, inhabited his kingdom. One of these was enamoured of a mortal, and gave birth to a daughter, who, on account of her semi-terrestrial origin, could not be brought up in heaven, and was in consequence confided to the care of the priests called Brahmins. They placed her in a pagoda, where, by way of proving the truth of the saying that every well-bred dog has a good nose, she displayed from her earliest years the greatest aptitude and liking for dancing. She, in her turn, had seven daughters who, gifted in like

manner as their mother and their grandmother, became dancers of renown.

"In the present day they are connected with the worship of the gods, and might be called the vestals of their religion, if its rules, whilst forbidding them to marry, did not place them entirely at the mercy and in the hands of the Brahmins. In a word, they are a species of religious harem of which the priests of Brahma are the Sultans. The bayadere, therefore, still lives, but exclusively in the temple or pagoda where, on the days of religious ceremonial, she executes the prescribed dances before the idols. Occasionally, too, she is to be found in the palace of some Rajah who has purchased her on her attaining maturity for a fabulous price from the Brahmins, for she is their property, and a very handsome revenue they manage to secure out of her and her fellows.

"This race of women would have long ago become extinct, if several castes in India, the weavers amongst others, did not look upon it as a pious duty to devote their daughters to the service of the temples. To be accepted they must not be more than five years old, must be possessed of sufficiently good looks to give promise of future beauty, and their family must renounce all idea of ever seeing them again. If they fulfil the required conditions they are handed over to the care of some aged matron, herself a graduated priestess, to whom is entrusted the task of instructing them in

their new duties, and of initiating them into all the mysteries of a dance, which, whilst it partakes of the nature of all Oriental dances, yet actually resembles no one of them, and is, moreover, invested with decidedly mystic characteristics.

"Such is the information, a little hazy, perhaps, but quite correct as far as it goes, which I am enabled to give you on the subject of the genuine bayadere. If you want a more detailed account, refer to that very instructive work, Jacolliot's "Voyage au pays des Bayadères."

"The first idea of Delange, de Morin and myself, was to hold our *fête* in the open air, and invite our dancers to come on the poop. The night was lovely—so luminous was the sky, and so bright was the star shine, that it gave one the idea of a prolonged twilight. Not a breath of air was there to raise a ripple on the water. Our engine alone disturbed the calm that reigned around, and its throbs were the only sound that broke the perfect stillness that had fallen on all. Never was there a night more propitious for a spectacle in the open sea. But the Captain, who, in order to make us forget his shortcomings, had placed himself entirely at our disposition and was doing his very best to help us, pointed out that the *fête* we were preparing would certainly lose much of its originality, and would be much less natural if it took place on the poop; because the Hindoos would object to being exposed to the gaze of

all the common sailors, and would in consequence not give us any real idea of their dancing powers. He advised us to select as our theatre the apology for a cabin, already occupied by his female passengers, and he undertook to enlarge it by removing some of the largest packages, and rolling up the mats which now served for curtains. His opinion and advice prevailed.

"About eleven o'clock in the evening, as we were creeping along the eastern shore of the Red Sea, the Captain, who had run in as near land as possible, stopped the engines, and cast anchor right in the centre of a perfect little bay, formed by some of the banks of coral so numerous in these parts. This manœuvre had scarcely been completed, when the trusty Joseph-Mohammed, in a black coat and a white tie, as correct "on duty" as he had promised to be, announced to us that all was ready. We descended from the poop, and, going a little way along the deck, reached the main hatchway, down which we went with the aid of a ladder.

"The little cabin had been made about seven yards long, its width remaining the same as before. We took our places at one end, just underneath an opening which had been made by removing the hatches, and we thus had the clear sky above our heads. Four lanterns of coloured glass, ornamented with arabesques, were suspended from the sides of the ship, two on either hand, but the moon, after dallying

with the sea, peeped in through the open ports, and spread around us all the light she thought we needed.

"We had no sooner seated ourselves on a kind of low couch, made of cushions with mats spread over them, than an Arab brought us coffee, served in small cups wreathed with silver filagree-work, and lighted for us chibouks filled with latakia. We looked about us, tolerably surprised, I assure you. All these surroundings, absolutely new to us, excited our curiosity, for though *blasés* as Parisians, as travellers we were without any experience.

"Very soon the draperies which answered the purpose of a drop-curtain were stirred, and a woman appeared, bowed low before us, crept cringingly to our feet, prostrated herself there, sprang up again with a bound, and took refuge in a corner of the cabin, whence we saw her take two large circular plates made of copper, which she began to beat gently, one against the other, with measured, but plaintive and seductive rhythm. In her, I thought, I recognized the one whom I had seen asleep with her knees up and her elbows resting on them. She might have been twenty years of age, but jaded and prematurely worn, as are all Eastern women, she looked older.

"Placed on the retired list as a dancer, she had been converted into a musician for the sake of keeping her employed. Her hair was interwoven with small gold coins strung on a thread; she wore a jacket and skirt of richly em-

broidered blue satin, and a cashmere bodice served to display her still charming figure. Her large sleepy eyes, whose lustre was but slightly dimmed, gazed vacantly into space.

"Little by little, the cymbals were beaten in quicker time; in lieu of just touching them gently, she struck them against each other, and the rhythm losing its plaintive character, became more animated and more marked. At last the two parts of the instrument, after being held suddenly apart, were brought together with a clash, the curtains were lifted all together, and three girls bounded into the midst of us.

"Their hair, the black-brown hair I described to you, was dishevelled, their shoulders bare, the lower part of their figures was draped in a tightly-fitting scarlet satin garb, and the rest of their bodies was covered with silk-gauze, fringed with gold, through which could be seen the burnished tints of their velvety skin.

"At first, without moving their feet from the Smyrna carpet which had been placed for them on the ground, they wound in and out, their arms extended before them, their heads turned backwards, their almond-shaped eyes half closed, their mouths slightly opened, their nostrils quivering, and their bosoms heaving with a slow, but even and continuous motion. They uttered not a sound, not even a sigh escaped them; their eyes alone grew gradually brighter, and their breasts heaved more quickly.

"They were, all three of them, wonderfully lovely, and though the eldest of them could

not have reached fifteen, their figures were fully developed. But, as I have already described them to you, I will only add that the animation which the motion of the dance lent them, served to enhance their beauty.

"After a moment or two, they became more and more animated, their arms were waved convulsively, their hands clutched at the air, and their whole bodies took the undulating movement which up to this time had seemed to be confined to the hips.

"Each of them, without paying the slightest attention to her neighbour, enacted some scene of impassioned comedy or tragic drama. One, like an inspired virgin, raised her eyes to heaven, and appeared to be sending on high a fervent prayer. Another pourtrayed the victim of unrequited love, and the third seemed plunged in a sort of ecstacy.

"It was a ballet, but a ballet of a new order, picturesque and highly coloured, conceived by a librettist born under the equator.

"To make a long story short, this strange, unheard of dance, of which I have given you but an imperfect idea, ended only when the performers sank to the ground, panting and exhausted.

"The stars glittered still over our heads, the moon, more brilliant than ever, enfolded us in her bright, clear rays, and a gentle breeze wafted to us across the water the countless odours of the neighbouring shore."

CHAPTER XXII.

FROM MISS BEATRICE POLES TO MISS EMILY—

"No, I shall never share the enthusiasm of my male companions for these three creatures. I maintain that they have not even good figures. Nobody will ever succeed in persuading me that beauty of form in a woman, consists of all those rounded curves, that *embonpoint*, that superfluous flesh which is simply fatal to all walking. As for their plump limbs and absurdly tiny feet, they excite my compassion. They are merely useless ornaments. Excuse me, somebody may say, they are of service to them in their dancing. That is the greatest mistake of all. They dance, if you can call it dancing, with everything except their feet, with their knees, their arms, their waists, their heads—their feet have nothing at all to do with it, and that is just where your argument fails, gentlemen all.

"I am not alluding to myself. As you know, my dear Emily, I always keep myself in the background as much as possible. I am thinking of my fellow countrywomen, whose reputation for beauty is world-wide. Look at the swan-like neck, the slender shoulders, the

waist which their two hands can span with ease, the hips indistinguishable from the waist, and their long and slim feet. They are women, if you like, genuine women! And our dancers! What grace, what cuts, what capers! I think I see them now, as they raise their discreetly slender arms above the small fair heads. Bah! how infinitely superior they are to all these bayaderes!

"It may be, for I am always frank with you, that my aversion to these bayaderes has something spiteful about it. I was positively disgusted to see those three men, instead of staying on deck with me, shutting themselves up for a whole evening in the society of these so-called dancers. In their defence they allege that it is simply a question of art and æstheticism, and that as observant travellers they are justified in seeing everything, and making notes on all conceivable subjects. I do not approve of this class of study. My idea is that the love of science and art has its limits, and that it should stop at the bayadere.

"But, my dear Emily, I have just awoke to the consciousness—a little late in the day, you will say—that you do not in the least understand this long tirade against the bayaderes of MM. de Morin, Périères and Delange. You are asking, in astonishment, where I am. You are on the verge of the belief that I am on my way to Calcutta, instead of being bound for the centre of Africa. A thousand pardons—I had let my pen and my ever vivid imagination run

on, and had forgotten that when I left you last I was at Cairo.

"I must tell you, then, that I am steaming along the Red Sea, but please excuse my entering in detail into the reason why this route has been chosen. The words, Red Sea, or Arabian gulf, if you prefer it, will, however, explain how it happens that I mention Africa and Asia indiscriminately. In reality, I am on neutral ground, equidistant from the two continents. If I stretch out my arm to the left towards the East, I am in Arabia; if to the right towards the West, I am in Nubia. Now you see the position; a very convenient one, is it not?

"At this moment I am on the left, that is to say on the Asiatic side, for our steamer has just called in at Djiddah, which may be regarded as the port of Mecca, that famous resort of pilgrims, whither every true follower of the Prophet should betake himself at least once in his life. Our bales and boxes have been sent on by the Nile to Khartoum; they will not arrive until after us, but quite soon enough, because if we are on the spot, we shall avoid a considerable expense in Customs charges. The Egyptians are adepts in the art of living at the expense of travellers; and, not content with making them pay duty at Suez, levy other contributions on entering and leaving Souakim.

"Our *personnel* is as yet not very numerous, and consequently gives us no trouble. It is composed of three female Nubians and two male Arabs, who were very strongly recommended

to us, and whom we have engaged as attendants and interpreters. These men are named Omar and Ali, besides a string of other appellations which I suppress, purely out of consideration for you. At Souakim we shall secure an escort and a supply of bearers for the indispensable part of our baggage. Not until we reach Khartoum, if we get so far into the interior of Africa, shall we form our caravan.

"The trip along the Red Sea is most interesting. On the morning following our departure from Suez, in magnificent weather, we saw the Sinai ranges and the Holy Mountain standing out in bold and clear relief. We passed, without stopping, by the little town of Tûr, inhabited by the Copts, those descendants of the primitive denizens of Egypt, and, twenty-four hours afterwards, we touched at Cosseir, on the western shore of the gulf.

"From the last-mentioned place we crossed the Red Sea once more for the purpose of putting in for a few moments at Yambo, in Arabian territory, a species of holy land, where Mussulman fanaticism reigns supreme in full force, for, alas! holy land in these parts is only another name for a spot given over entirely to every description of intolerance and barbarism.

"From Yambo we followed the coast as far Djiddah, where, as I have already told you, I am at this moment writing to you. Djiddah, the tour of which place I have just made, consists of an immense street filled with bazaars, where are displayed the products of our own

manufacture side by side with samples of Eastern taste. The markets, specially devoted to satisfying the appetite or voracity of the pilgrims to Mecca, are exceedingly curious. In them you see piled up together the fruits and vegetables gathered in Africa and Asia, and conveyed hither by ships or caravans; heaps of water melons, cocoa-nuts, dates, yams, sweet potatoes and chick-peas. On long tables are also ranged pyramids of honey-combs and bowls of couscoussoo, the favourite dish of Arabia.

"These market-halls and places, and the bazaars are crowded with Turks, Egyptians, Indians and Africans, to say nothing of dogs, horses and camels, the latter appearing quite dazed in the midst of all the coming and going, the babel of sounds, and the multitude of things, and picking their steps as if they were afraid of breaking something. Women ventured fearlessly into this crowd, and young Arab girls, very pretty, though often very thin—I mean to say very pretty, because they were so slender—walked to and fro gravely, with uncovered faces, shoulder to shoulder with the hermetically-veiled Turkish women, whose large slippers of yellow leather gave them a shuffling gait. Other Turkish women, of a higher class, passed by here and there, attended by eunuchs and mounted on donkeys.

* * * * *

"Oh! my dear Emily, what an awful calamity,

what a terrible misfortune, has befallen us! M. de Morin is lost to us—M. de Morin, the life and soul of our party, has fallen a victim to his own temerity.

"If you only knew—it is frightful—to die at his age—I must leave you—I am going at once with Madame de Guéran to the French Consulate."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The fears of Miss Poles were only too well founded; if M. de Morin still lived, and there were grave reasons for doubting it, he was in very great danger.

What had happened was, briefly, as follows. As soon as the steamer had cast anchor in the port of Djiddah, the travellers, attended by Joseph, went on shore, and after a tolerably long promenade through the bazaars, described by Miss Poles in her letter to her friend Emily, Madame de Guéran and her English companion expressed a desire to return to the ship, MM. Delange and Périères at once offering to escort them. M. de Morin, wishing to make a more minute inspection of the town, remained behind with Joseph, who followed him at a respectful distance, got up in a new bûrnus, purchased in Cairo to replace the one stolen together with the rest of his baggage.

M. de Morin, on leaving the bazaars, turned his steps towards the road to Mecca, and in a short time found himself before a large painted gate, ornamented with horizontal stripes of green and red. He was just passing underneath the archway leading to this gate, when one of

the attendants, hired at Cairo and employed as an interpreter, came up to him, and said—

"Master, do not go beyond this archway. It leads to the passage used by the Mussulman pilgrims, and the inhabitants of Djiddah do not like a Christian to go along it. On the wall you can see the iron hooks used in olden times to hang such infidels as might be foolhardy enough to venture this way. Under the rule of Mehemet-Ali, such barbarity, of course, is unknown, but the road to Mecca is dangerous, and you might be roughly handled by some more than usually fanatical band of pilgrims."

The trusty Mohammed-Abd-el-Gazal, in spite of the bûrnus, which ought to have given him courage, turned on his heel on hearing this news, and M. de Morin, after a momentary hesitation, followed his example. The latter recollected that he had engaged to accompany Madame de Guéran to Africa, that his excursion on the Arabian shore was a digression, and that it would be very bad taste in him to expose himself to personal danger from sheer curiosity.

However, his walk was not at an end yet. From the gateway on the Mecca road, the young Frenchman, still followed by Joseph, but this time also by the interpreter, Ali, went towards a second gateway, the one leading to Medina, and, after having left the walls of Djiddah behind him, found himself in front of a mosque.

"It is the tomb of our common mother," said Ali, in answer to a questioning look from de Morin. "According to the Koran, Eve,

driven forth from the terrestrial Paradise, took refuge on the site where Mecca now stands, died there and was buried here."

M. de Morin, after casting a profane and contemptuous glance at this tomb, which did not strike him as being very authentic, continued his walk, now across a vast and arid plain bounded by a chain of mountains. In the distance could be seen Djiddah, with its houses surmounted by terraces, thus imparting to it an Italian character, its minarets, its line of walls, and its mosques.

Tired and almost overcome with the heat, he very soon seated himself under the shade of a stunted palm, and was lighting his cigar, when a miniature caravan, consisting of six Arabs, one on horseback and the rest on camels, appeared on the scene, and, passing by him, halted behind the ruins of some old windmills, built by Mehemed-Ali, in 1815, during one of his campaigns against the Wahabees in El-Hejaz.

One of these Bedouins, he with the horse, separated himself from his comrades, rode round the mill, and then dismounted and brought himself to anchor about fifty yards from M. de Morin. The latter at once took out his drawing materials, and made a rapid sketch of the new comer, whose costume appeared to his inexperienced eyes most picturesque. A brown and white striped bûrnus, rather the worse for wear, covered the whole of his body; a camel's hair cord held round his head a black cotton handkerchief which served him as a

turban; in one hand he held a match-lock, and in the other a lance, whilst a long knife hung by a piece of string from his girdle.

The young painter had completed his sketch, and was putting away his pencils, when suddenly he heard a shout. He turned quickly round and looked for Joseph and Ali, but neither of them was in sight. Alarmed at their absence, he was preparing to run in the direction of the mill, which doubtless hid his companions from him, when the interpreter appeared. He seemed to be in a state of despair, raised his hands towards Heaven, and entered into an animated conversation with the Bedouin, whose costume the painter had just succeeded in transferring to his sketch-book. M. de Morin hurried to him, and soon learnt all that had occurred.

Whilst his master was sketching, Joseph, curious, no doubt, to know if, on account of his bûrnus, the Arabs would take him for one of themselves, approached them with a smiling air. But very soon his smiling face grew dark with anger, his eyes, which had been wandering over the scene, fixed themselves on one particular spot, his arm was gradually extended to its full length, and his finger pointed to something or other in front of him. On the back of one of the camels he had just perceived the greater part of the baggage stolen from the custom-house at Suez. Not only did he recognize his favourite portmanteau, but he read on one of packages the name he had himself traced upon it in Paris—Mohammed-Abd-el-Gazal.

He had found the thief at last! Unwilling to let him escape he rushed forward towards the Bedouins, but the group thus formed by Joseph, the camels, and their owners was hidden from M. de Morin by the ruins of the mill, and the young painter, absorbed in his sketch, had neither seen nor heard anything.

"My baggage! my baggage!" cried Joseph. "Give me up my baggage, you thieves!"

The Bedouins laughed heartily at the sight of this great, big, fair man, red as a turkey cock, shouting in a foreign language, but, nevertheless, habited like one of themselves. This mirth, all subdued though it was, for the Arabs are never boisterous even in their funniest moods, roused Joseph to a pitch of exasperation. The idea of recovering his lost treasure, whose loss he had so bitterly deplored, gave him courage. He ceased to speak, a very sensible proceeding on his part seeing that nobody understood him, ran to the camel and laid hold of his pet portmanteau.

This time the Bedouins understood him fully and they evidently disapproved of his proceedings, for they came up to him and endeavoured to drive him away. Joseph resisted, repulsed the enemy, and, once more laying hold of his portmanteau, showed signs of decamping with it.

There was no laughing now amongst the Arabs, who held a brief consultation over the state of affairs. Their conclave was of short duration and, rushing suddenly upon Joseph, they took him by the arms and legs, lifted him

up and hoisted him on to the back of one of the camels, where they made him fast with a rope alongside his portmanteau. Then they mounted the other camels, and the one which carried Joseph and his little all set off after his companions at full trot.

Such was the scene as described to M. de Morin by his interpreter.

"But why," enquired he of his informant, "did you not resist this abduction, and call me to the rescue of my servant?"

"I did not at first understand what was going on," replied Ali, "and when I did go to his assistance it was too late. It all passed in a second."

"To what tribe do these Bedouins belong?" asked M. de Morin.

"They are Nomads, and do not belong to any particular tribe."

"And who is the man you have brought with you, whose portrait I have just been taking? Why did he not take to flight with his comrades?"

"He was not one of them. He had ridden out with them thus far, to say good bye, but he was not following them. He had, in fact, just left them."

"Then you do not think him an accomplice of them?"

"No, he was just as much astonished as I was at the whole proceeding."

"Find out from him in what direction they have carried off my servant."

The Bedouin hesitated at first, but in the end declared that he was ignorant of the plans of his whilom companions.

"At all events," said Ali to him, "you know in what direction they went. Were they going to Medina?"

"No," said the Bedouin, "they took the road to the desert."

"Then you think they will cross the frontier of El-Hejaz?"

"I am sure of it."

"Can we overtake them easily?" asked the interpreter, by order of M. de Morin.

"No, their camels are first-rate."

"Good ones, I admit, but overladen," observed Ali.

"True," replied the Bedouin, looking round him on every side, "but I do not see an unladen camel to go in pursuit of them."

Ali translated this reply.

"Tell this man," said the painter, "that if I have not a camel, I have, at all events, a horse."

The interpreter, in astonishment, looked at his master without understanding in the least what he meant.

"Don't you see that horse there, by the ruins ready saddled and bridled?"

"But it does not belong to us; it is this man's property."

"Quite so, and I am going to take it from him."

"Take a horse from an Arab? Don't you

believe it, sir! You may take his wife or his children, but his horse, never!"

"Ask him for how much he will sell it to me."

"It is a very handsome, well-bred horse, and he would not part with it at any price."

"Never mind! Ask him."

As Ali had foreseen, the Bedouin declined to deprive himself of his steed.

"Then," said M. de Morin to the interpreter, "I order you to translate to him exactly what I am going to say, word for word, and at the same time with me."

"I will obey you."

The Frenchman, calm and self-possessed, but very determined, approached the Bedouin, who, resting on his lance, remained motionless.

"Your friends," said he, "have carried off one of my servants. It is my duty to go to his assistance and rescue him. You decline to sell me your horse, which is indispensable to me, and consequently I am going to take it. If we are not killed, I swear to restore it to you. But, if you stir a finger, or make any attempt whatever to hinder my departure, I swear I'll shoot you dead. Here is my weapon, and I am not joking."

He drew out of its case, slung from his shoulder-belt, a six-chambered revolver, of large bore, and ready loaded.

The Bedouin changed colour, but did not answer a word.

"Go and bring me the horse," said M. de Morin to the interpreter.

The order was given in so peremptory a tone that Ali had nothing to do but obey.

M. de Morin, revolver in hand, at a couple of paces from the Bedouin, held him in check.

Ali returned with the horse on which, without taking his eyes for an instant from the Arab, M. de Morin leaped at a single bound. There was nothing now, indeed, to be feared from the stranger, who understood from M. de Morin's words and looks that he was face to face with a man against whom it would be more than useless to struggle. He made a virtue, therefore, of necessity, and bowed before the superior force of his adversary, as all these semi-barbarians, harsh and cruel to the weak, but yielding and cowardly before the strong, know so well how to do.

In readiness, now, for a start, M. de Morin issued his final orders.

"You will go," said he to Ali, "to my friends in Djiddah, at once. You will tell them that I could not abandon to his fate a European who had left France with me. My protection is just as much due to him as his services are to me. My friends will understand me, for they would have done the same in my place. Ask them to consult amongst themselves without the loss of a moment, and to come to our rescue, in their turn, if they deem it necessary."

"Master," exclaimed Ali, "you are exposing yourself to certain death. What can you do, alone and unaided, against these Arabs, even if you overtake them?"

"In certain cases," replied M. de Morin, "argument is futile, and I have been arguing too long already. Do what I bid you, and do not lose sight of this man so long as I am within range of his gun. Good-bye!"

He took his horse by the head and set off at full gallop.

The Arab, still motionless, smiled a malicious smile, the meaning of which it was easy to divine. I shall not be long, he seemed to say, without my revenge upon this dog of an unbeliever.

CHAPTER XXIV.

As soon as M. de Morin had disappeared in a cloud of dust, Ali, in obedience to the orders he had received, took the road back to Djiddah. The Bedouin, after a moment's hesitation, took the same route. His material interests outweighed his prudence. He rendered himself liable, it is true, to be roughly handled by the Turkish authorities on his return to the town; for, if the European had powerful friends in Djiddah, they would make him responsible for the abduction carried out under his eyes by his companions. But, on the other hand, if he disappeared and concealed himself in the desert, how could the purloiner of his horse either restore the animal or pay him its value? And such a steed as his was worthy of considerable risk.

Having come to this conclusion, he thought it better to overtake Ali and enter into conversation with him, seeing that a little preliminary information on the score of M. de Morin might be useful.

The interpreter, with that shrewdness peculiar to the Arabs generally, and developed especially in the case of those who, like Ali, are in constant communication with strangers, was

equally quick in recognizing that he was bound to magnify to the utmost his master's importance, and to employ all his tact and skill in an endeavour to secure the assistance and co-operation of the Bedouin. For, if the latter perceived that such a line of conduct would conduce to his own interests, he would certainly not hesitate to institute such a search after M. de Morin and Joseph as would be sure to result in success. A genuine Arab would invariably refuse to come to the assistance of any European, if his doing so involved his pursuing or fighting against his co-religionists and his friends. But the Bedouin is not an Arab, though very often one is confounded with the other. The Arab is sedentary; he has his family, his clan, his tribe, his domestic hearth, his cattle, and very frequently his land. For their protection, or for the advantages to be derived from it, he appreciates the benefits of a partial civilization, relative to his wants, and he seeks after it. The Bedouin, on the contrary, is a Nomad; his horizon is bounded by the desert or the mountain; his property is limited to his weapons, his horse, or his camel; he lives by pillage alone, and his ideas of religion and morality are of the vaguest possible description. A story is told of a Bedouin, convicted of murder and theft, having been asked by a Frenchman—"What would you say to God, if you were summoned to appear before Him?" The reply was—"I should not say anything. I should merely greet Him. If He were good-natured and gave me food and tobacco, I should stay

with Him; if not, I should mount my horse and ride away." This answer proves conclusively that, to the majority of these people, God is only an earthly king, somewhat more powerful than the rest, and living in a remote desert. The Bedouins formerly were shepherds, who formed, as it were, numerous colonies around the sedentary population, but, little by little, their wandering life has deteriorated their character and brought them down in the social scale. They must not be confounded with the original type of the Arab race; they have the same genealogical tree, but they are only the decayed branches of a tree still green and flourishing.

Knowing all this, and having long been conversant with the Bedouin character, Ali, when questioned by the steedless cavalier, was most particular in informing him that M. de Morin and his friends were very great personages, under the protection of the Turkish Government, rich enough to repay with generosity any services rendered to them, and powerful enough to punish all attempts at desertion or treason.

Whilst thus endeavouring to enlist an ally, the interpreter reached the walls of Djiddah. He rapidly made his way down the street, which runs along the whole length of the town, gained the quay, got into a boat, and went on board the steamer, which already had its steam up, and only awaited M. de Morin and Joseph to weigh anchor.

In a very few words, Ali made Madame de Guéran, Miss Poles, and their two companions masters of the situation. Their dismay and anguish at first prevented their saying a word; but afterwards they had but one thought, but one resolve—to fly to the rescue of their friend, as he had to the succour of his servant. But how were they to set about it?

Were they, ignorant of the country, of its tracks and its customs, blindly to rush into a new venture? Would it not be wiser to reflect a little? Might they not, by over-precipitation, jeopardize the lives of those they wished to save? They were bound to act with circumspection and with a reasonable hope of success. With one common impulse they determined to betake themselves to the French Consul and demand his aid.

The Consul received them at once, and listened to what they had to say with the greatest kindness, but he, at the same time, regretfully declared that he could not officially lend them any practical assistance.

"From a restraining point of view alone," said he, "we have a certain influence. If your friend perishes I will inform my Government of the circumstance. It will demand reparation, the punishment of the guilty persons, if they can be found, which is very doubtful, and an indemnity which, after much correspondence, the Turkish Government will exact from the town of Djiddah. But of what advantage will that be to you? You want to rescue M. de

Morin safe and sound. And to gain that end, of what means can you make use, in a country where the Turkish authority is very frequently set at nought? The district of El-Hejaz, where we now are, has been infested for the last thirty years by bands of the Harbs tribe, who sack whole caravans, and the Turks have not yet succeeded in ridding themselves of these robbers and assassins. But if I am obliged to say 'no,' in my capacity as Consul, I am entirely at your disposal as a fellow-countryman and I make common cause with you. And now listen to the advice I am about to give you for the future."

Madame de Guéran, Miss Poles, M. Delange, and M. Périères drew nearer to the Consul, and fixed all their attention on him.

"First of all," commenced the representative of France at Djiddah, "start on this principle —do not rely upon any one but yourselves. You alone, gentlemen, can organize and direct the undertaking, for these ladies will have the goodness to take refuge in my house at the Consulate, under the safeguard of the French flag, and not mix themselves up in any active manner with this affair. You are no longer in Europe, where a woman can do as she pleases, but in the East, where her *rôle* is, at all events in appearance, a passive one."

Miss Poles made a very significant grimace, and the inaction thus imposed upon her was evidently distasteful. As for the Baroness, she appreciated the justice of the Consul's

remarks too well to enter any protest against them.

"Those premises settled, you, gentlemen, will return to your steamer and select three resolute sailors. Amongst the ship's company, and especially amongst the engineers, you will easily find some Europeans. Do not trouble yourself to ascertain whether they are accustomed to horses; in this country everybody rides, more or less. In default of Europeans, take Egyptians; Egypt has no love for Turkey. Add to these three men your two interpreters, because, as they were recommended to you by my *confrère* at Cairo, you can count upon them. Besides, I know them by name; they have frequently accompanied travellers in these parts, and are to be trusted. You will, therefore, counting yourselves, muster seven. Have you arms for all?"

"Certainly," said M. Périères, "on that score there will be nothing wanting. In order to be able to arm our African escorts we provided ourselves with a complete collection of revolvers and carefully-selected rifles."

"So far, so good. The question now is—what route are you to choose? That is an essential point. However, do not exaggerate your difficulties. These Bedouins would not take the Medina road with their prize, as, relatively speaking, it is too much frequented to please them. They would run the risk of being surprised by some other Nomad band with whom they are always either in competition or

at enmity, and who might carry off their prisoner. According to my idea, they have bent their steps towards the mountains where, in case of pursuit, they can find a secure retreat. You must overtake them before they arrive there. Do not lose any time. Hasten to your vessel, collect your men, arm them, arm yourselves, and come back here. I will undertake to provide you with horses. I have my own, my friends will lend me theirs, and you will soon know that the race of horses of El-Hejaz is one of the most valuable and renowned breeds in the world."

MM. Périères and Delange took leave of the Consul, followed out his instructions to the letter, and, an hour afterwards, they were on horseback with their escort, and had set out at full gallop.

The French flag was flying over the Consulate, for the representative of France at Djiddah wished the inhabitants to be informed of what had occurred, and wished, too, to let them know that the French manage their own affairs by themselves, without calling on any one for support or protection.

CHAPTER XXV.

A SOLITARY Bedouin joined the expedition which set out in search of the Europeans. This was Abou-Zamil, the man whose horse M. de Morin had so unceremoniously appropriated. Anxious to regain his steed; attracted, on the one hand, by the arguments and brilliant inducements held out by the interpreter, Ali; dismayed, on the other, by the threats of the Consul, who seemed disposed to hold him responsible for the abduction of Joseph, the Bedouin, after a period of hesitation, ended by offering his services to the expedition. They were provisionally accepted; but he was not armed, like the men composing the escort, with pistol, gun, and axe.

The troop of horsemen dashed through Djiddah at full gallop, and took the road along which, but a few hours previously, the young painter, his interpreter, and his servant had passed.

Ali rode at their head and showed them the way. When they reached the ruins of the mill, whence M. de Morin had started off in sole pursuit of his five Bedouins, they stopped to consult. But no deliberation was necessary, for along the sand they could easily discern the tracks left by the camels, and, parallel with

them, the fainter hoof-marks of Abou-Zamil's horse.

This trail the whole troop followed for five or six leagues, but the sun, gradually taking leave of the plain over which they had been riding for the last two hours, was slowly sinking behind the mountains of El-Hejaz, which bounded the horizon.

A few moments more and the track would no longer be visible. They determined to profit to the utmost by the sun's last rays, and the horses, urged on by their riders, increased their pace, and soon placed another dozen miles behind them.

By this time the sun had just given place to the stars, whose light, brilliant as it was, did not suffice to light up the track. Another halt was therefore made, and a fresh consultation held.

Should they trust to fortune and ride on at hap-hazard? Or would it be better to trust themselves to Abou-Zamil, who undertook to act as guide and bring the travellers to the precise spot where he imagined his friends would have stopped?

This question gave rise to some consideration, for the Bedouin seemed to be an object of suspicion to everybody except Ali and Omar—the two interpreters—who maintained that, up to a certain point, he might be trusted.

Their opinion prevailed; but M. Périères thought it prudent to take Abou-Zamil aside and address the following little speech to him, which

was simultaneously translated by one of the interpreters.

"We are about to entrust to you not only our own safety, but that of our friends, whom we are endeavouring to find, and we shall follow your lead throughout the night without any question or remonstrance whatever. If, by to-morrow morning, no accident shall have happened to us, and if we have regained our companions, I give you my word as a Frenchman, and it is worth all your oaths taken on the Koran, that on our return to Djiddah, I will give you the value of three magnificent camels, as well as a gun, which will make you king of the desert. But if you play us false and lead us out of our proper course, if our friends are killed, we will tie you to the nearest tree and shoot you, as they shoot traitors in our country. It is for you to choose."

The eyes of Abou-Zamil sparkled with joy when he heard mention of the camels and the gun, nor did he cower at the threat of being shot, for he looked upon that as a good sign. Nevertheless, he made one reservation—

"I promise," said he, "not to betray you, and I undertake to put you in the right road, but I cannot engage that you will find your companions alive. I know nothing of what has passed for some hours, or is passing, perhaps, at this moment. God alone knows that."

M. Périères was compelled to admit that there was a certain amount of logic in the argument.

"We are not unjust," he replied. "If it can be proved to us that you have done all in your power to prevent any hindrance or disaster, we shall be satisfied, and you shall have your promised reward."

"Good," said Abou-Zamil. "Trust to me."

This question settled, a halt was ordered, for the horses, called upon for a long journey, had need of rest.

Omar and Ali, like provident servants, had taken care, when they set out, to place a supply of provisions in the large saddle-bags which they carried, and now they proceeded to distribute to all a portion of the welcome viands. As for the horses, they were turned loose and had to make the most of such tufts of grass as they could find half buried in the sand.

In the evening "boot and saddle" was once more the order. The sky was literally studded with stars, but the moon had not yet appeared.

Abou-Zamil took the lead. Suddenly he gave a shrill, prolonged whistle, familiar to the horses of El-Hejaz, and, at this signal, these splendid animals pricked up their ears, stretched out their necks, and bounded off at full speed. Several of the riders, unprepared for this sudden start, were within an ace of losing their seats, and they certainly would have lost them if they had been sitting on English saddles. But the Arab saddle is so high peaked, both before and behind, that the rider is almost, so to speak, partitioned in; his feet are placed in large

stirrups, and a fall, if not impossible, is at all events difficult. Moreover, the paces of the Arab horses have nothing jerky about them, but are as smooth and regular as possible. Their gallop is more conducive to sleep than to excitement, and it is no uncommon sight to see an Arab tie his bridle to the pommel of his saddle, set his horse going, and, so long as he knows the road to be even, sleep as calmly as if he were under his tent.

At this sweeping stride, which, though so smooth, is also productive of dizziness, they continued on and on for some hours. Every now and then MM. Périères and Delange, found their breath failing them from bending down in their saddles and receiving the wind in their faces; but, at the same time, they frequently experienced a sort of exhilaration on meeting the air; their lungs dilated, and their brows, still heated from the effects of the hot sun during the day, felt refreshed and comforted. They were under the influence of the intoxication of the desert, that feeling of elation experienced by those who know what it is to ride on and on, no obstacle in their way, no road to follow, no defined goal to reach, with nothing to limit their far-reaching gaze, in absolute silence and boundless space, between heaven and earth.

But as this feeling of elation subsided, as their mind resumed its habitual tone, they began to wonder how it was that the speed of their horses did not slacken, how it was that these

creatures did not fall down, worn out with fatigue. They had heard or read that certain breeds of Arab horses were capable of doing their fifty or sixty leagues without drawing rein, but they had not put much faith in such tales. They saw now that these thoroughbreds, whose pedigree has been handed down from century to century amongst the tribes, were capable of any exploit. They confessed, too, that the French Consul had not deceived them when he said that the horses of El-Hejaz were amongst the most perfect of Arabia.

The first faint glimmer of dawn appeared in the East, and still these steeds, prodigies in their way, held on their rapid course. At length Abou-Zamil showed signs of slackening the pace; he ceased to give the shrill, prolonged whistle with which he roused the horses to fresh exertions, the only sound that, from time to time, had broken the awful silence of the desert.

A few moments more, and, at a sign from the Bedouin, the whole troop came to a dead stop. With one bound he sprang off his horse, stooped down, and, by the faint light of dawn, examined the ground about where he stood with great care. After a short scrutiny he stood up, and, turning to Ali, who was nearest to him, said—

"Look here."

And he showed him in the sand the foot-prints of five camels and a horse.

M. Périères and M. Delange hurried to the spot, and in their delight expressed themselves in the warmest manner towards the Bedouin.

"And what are we to do now?" they asked.

"That is your affair," replied Abou-Zamil. "I have fulfilled my engagement, and, thanks to me, you have overtaken the persons whom you have been pursuing."

"They are, then, near here?" asked the interpreters.

"They are over there," replied the Bedouin, pointing to the spot, "and as soon as the sun appears you will see their encampment."

"Consequently," said M. Delange, gleefully, "we are on the point of regaining our friend."

"I know nothing about that," was the Arab's reply.

"Did you not show us the hoof-prints of his horse in the sand? At all events he must have come thus far."

"A loose horse in the desert," answered Abou-Zamil, gravely, "leaves the same traces as one with a rider on his back."

The joy which the two young men had at first experienced received a sudden check. Their brows were knit, and their eyes, following the direction pointed out by the guide, anxiously endeavoured to fathom the secrets of the Arab camp.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The first rays of the sun, as Abou had said, unfolded to view, at a distance of about fifteen hundred yards, the Bedouin encampment. It consisted of some thirty tents, pitched in a semi-circle in front of the spur of the mountain range of El-Hejaz. A small clump of palms, whose tops were just gilded by the beams of the rising sun, could be discerned on the right in the midst of a tolerably fresh patch of verdure, where strayed at liberty a score of horses and camels. Complete quiet appeared to reign throughout the encampment, which had not yet awoke to life and movement.

"To horse again!" exclaimed M. Périères, who was in a state of great excitement. "In five minutes we can reach these tents, we can take their occupants by surprise, and if our friends are there we will rescue them."

"Such an unexpected inroad as that," observed the interpreter Omar, "would be looked upon as an attack. The Bedouins would defend themselves, and a conflict, which we must endeavour to avoid, would inevitably result. Would it not be wiser to take an hour's rest? Both we and our horses need it sorely."

"It is all very well for you," said M. Delange, quickly, "but do you think that we could rest

quietly in this state of suspense and anxiety about our friends? It is impossible. Our goal is too near at hand for us not to try, at all events, to reach it. Besides, an hour's rest, so far from being of service to us or our horses, would only make us feel our fatigue all the more. I agree with Périères; let us make for the tents, after giving notice of our presence, if you think that act of prudence indispensable."

Omar and Ali exchanged glances. They were by no means at their ease with regard to the words they had just heard, and still less so with the manner in which they had been spoken. The two Europeans, over-excited by a sleepless night and their hurried ride, did not appear possessed of their usual coolness; they were acted upon by their nervous system instead of by their reason. The state of mind in which they were might easily be productive of disaster, for the Arabs, like all men of action, can only be intimidated by calmness and cool resolution.

But the interpreters, seeing that any further remonstrance or opposition would only serve to increase the irritation of MM. Périères and Delange, thought it better to give way.

"How," said Ali, "are we to announce our presence to these people?"

"By firing a shot or two in the air," said M. Delange. "That is the way you present yourselves in the desert, is it not?"

"Do not let us waste our powder on the empty air," observed the second interpreter. "We may want it."

"Very well, then; the Bedouin, who has brought us here, can go on a little way in advance, enter the encampment of his friends, and awake them with the news of our presence amongst them."

Abou-Zamil was summoned, and informed of what was expected from him.

"Not for ten camels," was his reponse, "would I do what you ask me. If they see me, my friends will accuse me at once of having disclosed to you their place of retreat, and they will revenge themselves by killing me. I have already told you that I have fulfilled my compact—count no more on me."

"To horse, then!" cried M. Périères. "We can on our way determine what to do."

The whole body started off at once in the direction of the camp, where some movement was now visible. Several men appeared at the doors of the tents, and some women were seen hastening towards the patch of grass where the animals were feeding.

When about a hundred yards from the nearest tent, the two interpreters, at an order from M. Delange, fired three shots in the air and went on in front, as their flowing bûrnus would cause less alarm to the Bedouins than the costumes of the Europeans—the tribe might even take them for friends. At the same time, at the parting suggestion of Amou-Zamil, one of the three sailors left his companions, rode rapidly round the encampment, and posted himself at the entrance of the narrow defile

leading to the mountains. The Bedouin, who thus gave one more proof of his good faith, had explained to the interpreters that if M. de Morin and Joseph were still prisoners and alive, their captors might try to escape with them to the mountains on the first symptom of an attack. The horseman so detached and placed on guard was ordered to appeal for assistance by firing off his gun, in case any of the Bedouins should attempt to force a passage into the defile.

A score of the Nomads and twice as many women and children had surrounded the interpreters by the time that the rest of the band joined them.

"Where is your chief?" asked M. Périères, in a peremptory tone, making his horse prance so as to prevent the people from crowding in upon him.

A man of about thirty stepped forward, spare and undersized, with thin lips, piercing eyes, a short and spare beard, and a very swarthy complexion. Everything about him bespoke a dogged determination and unflinching audacity, coupled with cunning and duplicity.

"What do you want?" said he. "And, first of all, do you come as a friend or an enemy?"

"As you please," said M. Périères. "Take your choice."

This reply, literally translated, and the haughty look of M. Périères produced a certain impression upon the chief and the men of his following. To dare to speak thus proudly, and to hesitate to accept the friendship apparently

offered to them, the Europeans must be conscious of their superiority. Several of the Bedouins scanned the horizon to see if a second troop was following the first.

"Again I ask, what do you want?" said the chief, in a calm voice.

"I desire," replied M. Périères, "that two of my fellow countrymen, detained as prisoners in your camp, may be at once released."

"No one of your fellow countrymen is in our midst. What makes you suppose that they are here?"

"At Djiddah yesterday, at the third hour of the day, men belonging to your tribe made prisoner one of my servants, and soon afterwards also a friend of mine, who followed in pursuit of them. Where is my friend, and where is my servant?"

"I know not. Why do you accuse the men of my tribe of this abduction?"

"Because since yesterday I have followed on the track of the spoilers, and it has led me here."

"You are mistaken. We are not yet in the open desert, and the tracks of more than one caravan can be seen in the sand, from the sea to the mountain."

"I am not mistaken, I tell you; the tracks are yet fresh. You can see them a few paces hence. They show that five camels and a horse have passed this way, and you will not persuade me that another caravan, of precisely the same description, has crossed this plain."

The chief made no reply, and all the men in

the encampment, by this time armed, closed up to him, forming, a group of about thirty individuals, supported by a regular mob of women and children. So long as their chief was silent, these people gesticulated defiantly at the Europeans, and, what was more dangerous, came near enough to touch them.

M. Périères and M. Delange began to comprehend the danger they were incurring. The firmness of their attitude had, for an instant, intimidated the Bedouins, but, in the end, it exasperated them, and, as no other caravan appeared on the horizon to give them food for reflection, their anger increased every moment.

But, with the consciousness of danger, and still more with the knowledge of the responsibility which devolved upon them, M. Périères had recovered his wonted coolness. He was now, in reality, the man described one evening by Madame de Guéran in a few words—firm, courageous, intrepid as M. de Morin, without his imprudence. He was, so to speak, transformed in a second; his voice no longer had the same tone, his very look was changed. The two Arabs in his train saw this resolution at once. They felt that they were commanded by one of those leaders whom soldiers love to obey.

M. Périères, without turning his head or losing sight of his adversaries, issued his orders to the escort—

"When I raise my hand," he said, "cover these people with your rifles, but do not fire until I give the word."

The shouts and threats continued.

"Tell your women and children to withdraw," said M. Périères, addressing the chief.

The chief did not condescend to reply.

The European raised his hand.

M. Delange, his two interpreters, and his two sailors unslung their rifles from their saddles and brought them up to their shoulders.

The women and children at once fled, with cries of terror, in all directions. But, at the same time the Nomads cocked their carbines.

M. Périères once more addressed the chief.

"If your men," he said, "do not at once lower their pieces, I shall order mine to fire, and you may rest assured that though we are fewer in number, we are the stronger."

The chief appeared to reflect, and, addressing the Frenchman, said—

"For the last time, what do you want? I repeat that your friends are not here."

"What has become of them?"

"Well, then—they attacked my men, who killed them."

"Show me their dead bodies, if that be so."

"Go back along the way by which you came, and you will find them stretched on the sand."

"You lie!" exclaimed M. Périères. "You always try to conceal your crimes, and you would not have left your victims on the road."

"What do you want to do?" asked the chief.

"I want to visit all the tents in your encampment."

"Never! Unbelievers do not enter our dwelling-places."

"We will see about that!" exclaimed the Frenchman, and, turning to his followers, he cried out, "Forward!"

The struggle had commenced—the exasperation of the Bedouins was at its height, and the determination of the Europeans was unyielding.

Suddenly, in the distance, behind the tents and from the entrance of the defile, a shot was heard. It came from the solitary sentinel, who gave the preconcerted signal. Were M. de Morin and Joseph still alive, and were they being hurried off into the mountains?

CHAPTER XXVII.

It now became necessary to join the sentinel at all hazards, and ascertain what was going on in that direction. The six men, at an order from M. Périères, formed up in close order, ready to charge the Bedouins if any attempt were made to bar their passage. But the report which had so unexpectedly resounded from the entrance to the defile resulted in a modification of the bellicose ideas of the Nomads, and in delaying their attack. The sharp, ringing crack of the rifle did not seem to them at all like the sound produced by their accustomed arms. They concluded, therefore, that succour was at hand for the Europeans from the direction of the mountain, and instead of presenting a bold front and making any resistance, they precipitately opened out and let the band of horsemen through their midst. The latter were not slow to make use of their advantage, and a few moments saw them at the end of the mountain spur.

As soon as they reached the head of the defile the sentinel met them and made his report. He had not been on his post a quarter of an hour, when five Bedouins, on foot, and dragging along with them a prisoner whom he was not able

to recognize, left the camp and advanced towards him. In obedience to his orders, he at once fired, and then took refuge behind a rock.

"Take your place in the ranks," said M. Périères, at the same time giving the word, "Forward!"

The defile, in which the little troop found themselves, was a narrow, tortuous, uneven pass of no great length. It did not form part of the mountain range, but was a gorge debouching abruptly on to a plain. As soon as they were fairly in it they saw the five Nomads running as hard as they could towards another spur of the mountain, and, without hesitation, they set off in pursuit and speedily came up with the Bedouins.

The latter took to flight at once on seeing that they were pursued, firing a few random and harmless shots as they went, and, lest their movements should be retarded, they abandoned their prisoner. The unfortunate captive, with his hands tied behind his back, was lying flat on his face, with his head half buried in the sand. His rescuers hastened to raise him on his feet, and recognized Mohammed-Abd-el-Gazal, pale as death, his features convulsed with fear, his eyes haggard, his hair, beard, and eyebrows smothered in sand, his bûrnus gone, in his shirt-sleeves, and altogether in the most pitiable plight.

They cut his bonds, made him sit down, wiped the sand from off his face, poured down his throat a few drops of brandy, slapped his

hands, murmured comforting words in his ears, and, in a word, did all they could to revive his spirits and reassure him as to his fate.

In spite of all their attentions, it was fully five minutes before he had recovered sufficiently to be able to see and speak to his fellow-countrymen, and even then he was so bewildered that he could only stammer out that he knew nothing of M. de Morin, about whose fate every one was anxiously enquiring.

"But surely," asked M. Périères, "you have seen him. He overtook you, did he not?"

"Oh, yes," stuttered Joseph, "he overtook me—perhaps it would have been better for me if he had not, but he did."

"What did he do? What happened?" asked everybody in the same breath.

"What happened? I know nothing more."

"Come, collect your thoughts," said M. Périères. "You are no longer a prisoner, we have rescued you."

"You have rescued me," repeated Joseph, still in a state of complete bewilderment, "but they will recapture me. The monsters! the monsters! What a terrible time I have had with them! And I told them that they might keep my portmanteau. I did not want it any more. Keep all my baggage if you like, I said. I will give you a receipt—anything to please you. They did not listen to me, and the camel kept on always—kept on—kept on—I fell to the right—I fell to the left—I fell at full length—I fell—good heavens, what a night! Some-

times I thought I was on board the steamer again, and that I was sick—so sick! I had been told that a camel sometimes gives one that sensation—but I would not believe it—and I did so admire the beasts—but, I hate them—yes, I hate them!"

M. Périères thought it was high time to interrupt him, so, putting his hand on his shoulder, he said—

"If you do not stop those *jeremiads* at once, if you do not stand on your feet like a man, and if you do not answer my questions, and nothing but my questions, I will bring up one of those camels you are so fond of, and will have you strapped on its back."

This threat had the desired effect. Joseph-Mohammed recovered himself, and awaited his cross-examination.

"At what hour," said M. Delange, "did you see M. de Morin?"

"I do not know what o'clock it was," answered Joseph, "but it had been dark for a long time, and my camel would go on—on—on—"

"To the devil with your camel! We have told you to stop that nonsense. What happened when your master arrived?"

"We went faster than ever. The Bedouins heard somebody behind them, and hoped to escape being overtaken. But I distinctly heard the tread of a horse, and I heard M. de Morin call out—'halt, or I fire.' But they did not halt. Then a shot was fired

—and then there was some shouting, and more shots—and then the voice of my master again could be heard above the din—and, at last, all was quiet. But my camel would go on—on—on, and I fancied I was alone on his back. The wretched Bedouin had got off. The rest of the caravan were not following us. I got hold of the bridle with both my hands, and tried to stop the camel. I did not think of anything but that. At last, I succeeded, and encouraged by my success, I was about to try to undo the cord round my waist, which tied me to my baggage, when I heard fresh shouts—and that brute of an Arab overtook me—"

Joseph was going on with his tale, but M. Périères stopped him once more.

"We have allowed you to ramble on in your own way, because we hoped to learn, amongst all this verbiage, something about our friend. What has become of him? Has he been killed by these men? Answer."

"I know nothing—I know nothing at all. My Bedouin got up behind me once more, muttering something that I did not then understand, but I soon understood that he intended to beat me; beating—"

"Enough," said M. Delange.

"Oh, yes, quite enough!" repeated Joseph, naïvely.

"What happened afterwards? Did the other Bedouins rejoin you?"

"No, we went on alone."

"Nobody followed you?"

"Nobody; the others remained behind."

"And where were you taken?"

"To a sort of camp, where everybody ran out to look at me. The women were especially inquisitive. Some of them passed their hands over my hair, and my whiskers—they thought the whiskers very funny. But my Bedouin drove them away, and made me get off the camel. I had no objection to do that, I assure you. Then he ordered me to walk on before him, and he pushed me into a tent, after having robbed me of my bûrnus. Bruised and sore, I fell asleep. In about an hour they seized on me again, and dragged me, on foot this time, which, at all events, was an improvement. Then I heard shouts and a shot or two. I was hit over the back with the butt-end of a gun, and fell down where you found me."

"And you cannot tell us anything about M. de Morin?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"Then, my men," exclaimed M. Périères, turning to his escort, "we must go back to the camp and renew our search."

"You are never going to leave me here?" cried Mohammed the miserable.

"No, walk in the middle. We shall be obliged to go at a walk, for the horses cannot gallop down this defile."

The little band went cautiously along the narrow gorge, for they feared they might be attacked there. Nothing, in fact, would have

been easier than for the Bedouins to have concealed themselves behind the rocks and hillocks of sand, and to have picked off, one by one, each individual horseman. But the Nomads were ignorant of the number of the enemy, and cautiously awaited their approach. As soon, however, as they saw that only two additions, the sentinel and the rescued captive, had been made to the troop, they resumed the defensive at once.

During the hour that had passed they had had time to collect their horses and camels, to saddle them, to gather together all their armed men, and so to form a compact body, which, if not very numerous, was still sufficiently formidable.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

After a short deliberation the Europeans, calm and resolute, advanced towards the camp, and as they did so the interpreter, Ali, who was riding by the side of MM. Périères and Delange, said to them—

"Do you notice that the number of our adversaries appears to have decreased? I counted them an hour ago, and then they mustered thirty, besides the five who were escaping with their prisoner and whom we overtook. Now there are only twenty-two, and that at a time when they need all their strength. What has become of the others?"

"They are going to take us in rear," replied M. Delange. "Be cautious."

"I have no fear on that score," said the interpreter. "The Bedouins despise that class of tactics; they know nothing about advanced parties or rearguards. I have an altogether different idea."

"And that is?" asked the two Frenchmen, simultaneously.

"The men whose absence I have just noticed may very well be employed, at this moment, in keeping guard over their second prisoner, your friend."

"Do you think so? Then if we are victorious they will kill him."

"They will be far more certain to kill him if we are defeated."

"That is true. We must trust in God!" said M. Delange.

"Allah defend us!" exclaimed the interpreter.

The small band of horsemen was now only separated from the Bedouins by a very small extent of ground, and they marched on in silence, at a walk, as if they were at a review, each man having his revolver in his hand but concealing it behind the pommel of his saddle. The Nomads, on the contrary, were gesticulating, brandishing their arms, exciting their camels with their voices, and spurring their horses, but without moving from the position they had taken up.

There were no longer any women or children to be seen in the encampment; they had prudently betaken themselves to the tents, in readiness, when the battle should be over, to insult and torture the vanquished.

As he had done at the first interview, M. Périères, followed by an intepreter, rode straight up to the chief, who, mounted on a magnificent steed, was in advance of his force.

"I have found one of my companions. I now come to demand the other."

"I have already told you that he has been killed," answered the chief.

"And I continue to disbelieve you," said M.

Périéres. "Did you not tell me that both were dead? You knew to the contrary, just as well as you know now where to lay your hands on the one I seek."

"Seek away," said the chief, laughing. "I will open out a passage for you to our tents."

"To enclose us between that species of wall and your men? Not a bit of it! Lead on and we will follow you."

The chief, without moving, laughed aloud and honoured M. Périères with an insolent stare, whilst all his men commenced to brandish their spears and lay hold of their guns.

The young Frenchman, more and more self-possessed, but determined, in the perilous position in which he was placed, to strike some blow which should either kill or cure all, leaned towards Ali and gave him an order.

The interpreter was not sufficiently master of himself to hide his astonishment, so dangerous and difficult of execution did the order seem. But he made ready to obey.

The chief was still in front, some paces from his men.

Then M. Périères, half turning in his saddle towards the escort, said, the Bedouins of course not understanding a word—

"Put away your revolvers, and when you see me advance, take your guns and aim steadily at the men who are nearest to the chief. Ready!"

A few seconds passed away, and then, without it being possible for any one to foresee the

movement, M. Périères and Ali made their horses clear at one bound the gap which separated them from the Bedouin chief, on whom they threw themselves on either side, to the right and left, and, holding their pistols to his head, they seized the bridle of his horse and dragged him back with them. At the same time, the other five Europeans, carrying out the order of M. Périères, aimed steadily at the nearest Bedouins, thus startling them to such an extent and paralyzing them so completely that they were unable, in the first moment of confusion, to rush to the assistance of their chief.

This novel plan of operations had, indeed, been so rapidly carried out that not only the Nomads but their adversaries themselves were bewildered. But the moment the former had recovered from their surprise, they in turn levelled their guns at the Europeans.

The two interpreters then advanced and declared that, if the Bedouins made one step forward, or fired a single shot, their chief would be put to death before their very eyes. He, at the same time, was disarmed, in spite of his resistance, and held fast in the front rank of the little troop by two sailors.

As for M. Périères, he calmly took out of his pocket a box of matches and a cigar, and as he lighted it, said to M. Delange—

"That was not a bad move of ours, was it? But how are we to get out of this fix? Those idiots are looking at us without budging an inch, and we are looking at them without stirring a

yard. This dumb show may last for a considerable time, and still de Morin is not given back to us."

"And you may add," observed the young doctor, as he, in his turn, lighted a cigar, "that these savages have, doubtless, breakfasted well, whilst we are simply famishing and our provisions are exhausted. And, in addition to all that, there is this terrific heat, which they do not seem to mind in the least, whilst I am being roasted, joint by joint. Now, if we could only get into the shade, under those palm-trees yonder."

"Do not dream of any such thing. In our immobility lies our strength."

"That is possible; but it also possesses the power of making me very sleepy. Holloa! what is going on down there? It seems to me that there are some fresh bûrnus on the scene. Have these wretches received a reinforcement? There are enough of them already, goodness knows."

"Yes," said M. Périères, standing up in his stirrups, "those are the eight men we missed. Our interpreter was complaining just now of being out in his reckoning. He ought to be satisfied now."

As a matter of fact, several Bedouins emerged from the clump of palms on the right of the camp, and rejoined the main body.

"Your friend is in their midst!" exclaimed Ali, suddenly. "I thought as much."

M. Périères and M. Delange, too much moved

to speak, pressed each other's hand in silence. The friend whom, though they never confessed as much, they believed to be dead, still lived and was close to them. They saw him, as he came towards them, insulted by one, hustled by another, struck by a third, half naked, covered with blood, but calm and almost smiling.

When he reached the main body of the Bedouins they opened out to let him pass and placed him in the front rank, face to face with their captive chief.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The first thought of M. de Morin, as soon as he saw that only about a dozen yards separated him from his friends, was to speak to them.

"You are indeed good to come to my rescue," said he, "for one moment later and they would have shot me. But when the report that you had seized upon their chief reached the ears of my gaolers, they postponed my execution so that I might play the part of hostage."

The Nomads, when first they heard their prisoner speaking, were silent, expecting to be able to understand what he said. When, however, they found that they could not even catch the sense of his words, one of them hit him a violent blow with the butt-end of his musket as a hint to be silent.

M. Périères at once told one of his men to hit the chief precisely as M. de Morin had been hit. The Bedouins, though horrified at this indignity, understood the lesson and took the hint.

"You are evidently at home with the *lex talionis*," exclaimed M. de Morin, imperturbable as ever, and apparently regardless of the blow he had just received, "accept my congratulations. The thanks I owe you we will post-

pone, as at this particular moment I am not exactly in a position to express myself as I should wish. Suffice it to say that ever since I have seen your dear, old, familiar figures over there I have been half wild to get to you."

He was interrupted once more. An Arab had conceived the idea of making a sort of gag with a piece of old cloth, and of inserting it in the prisoner's mouth.

"A gag for the chief!" cried M. Périères, turning towards his men.

His order was on the point of being obeyed, but the Bedouins reflected that it would be an advantage to them to hear what their leader might have to say, and so they abandoned the gag just as they had retired from the butt-end business.

The two prisoners could thus, on both sides, keep open their communications with their fellow-countrymen, only the game was not quite even. Thanks to the interpreters, the Europeans were kept fully informed of all that passed between the Bedouin chief and his men; but the latter had not the faintest idea of the conversation between the Frenchman and his friends.

"I congratulate you once more," exclaimed M. de Morin; "these rascals are checkmated for the nonce. Ah! if I had only been able to do ditto last night! Do you know how I fell into their clutches? They are accustomed to the gloom of the desert, and can see in the dark, the blackguards, whereas I had to grope

my way. Moreover, they converted their camels into ramparts. They are double-barrelled animals are those camels, with feet wherewith to move, and a back and belly to serve as a fortification. It was in vain that I fired my revolver, seeing that I only hit the outer wall. When I had expended all but one round of my ammunition, they threw themselves upon me and made me a prisoner. And, *apropos* of that, have you any idea what has become of Joseph?"

"We have rescued him," said M. Périères. "He is here with us. Show yourself, Joseph."

The head of Mohammed Abd-el-Gazal appeared timidly a few inches in front of the rest of the line.

"Holloa! there you are, my friend!" said M. de Morin. "I am right glad to see you again, though you have been a source of average misfortune to me and are an arrant coward into the bargain. But, since you are there, it is only right that you should wait on me once more. Ask M. Périères for a cigar and bring it to me."

When he heard this order Joseph trembled in every limb. However, if he were somewhat wanting in combatant qualifications, it is only just to say that as a servant he was beyond reproach. He had, also, such a lively sense of his duties that, to carry them out, he was capable, once in a way, of heroism. Consequently, in spite of his shaking limbs and trembling

body, he was seen to cross the open space which separated him from M. de Morin, hand him a cigar, take a match from the box supplied by M. Périères, light it, and present it with all respect to his master.

The Bedouins, like all semi-savage races, are regular children. The veriest trifle serves to amuse them, and they have a variableness of mood which is truly surprising. Enraged as they had been but a moment ago, they became quite good-tempered when they saw Joseph. To menace succeeded gaiety, and hearty laughter to dire threats.

Mohammed, it must be confessed, was at this moment a sight to see. His staring eyes were almost starting out of his head from fear; the very hairs of his whiskers appeared to stand on end; his nose, empurpled by the sun, produced a most picturesque effect, full of vivid contrast, in the centre of a face blanched with fright; the fat shoulders of the lazy Parisian stuck out of his tattered shirt, and his inordinately prominent stomach protruded over the waistband of his trousers, whose fastenings, alas! had for the most part disappeared during the night. To complete the picture, in his anxiety to protect his bald head from all danger of sunstroke, he had knotted his handkerchief at the four corners, and had made a sort of Chinese skull-cap out of it.

"See," cried M. de Morin to his companions, "how all this amuses the Bedouins. If we could only take advantage of it!"

"I was thinking of that," replied M. Périères. "What do you propose?"

"How did you manage to get hold of the chief?" asked the young painter.

"By rushing on him unexpectedly," said M. Delange.

"Very well, then! Put the same plan in operation with me. I shall give you less trouble than the chief, seeing that instead of resisting, as he was bound to do, I shall help you. Make your arrangements without delay, my dear Périères. I am going, as my share of the job, to cater for the amusement of these fools, and as soon as their mirth is at its height you must act."

Joseph, after having given M. de Morin time to light his cigar, thought only of getting back to his companions; but he had scarcely re-crossed the open space at a run than he heard himself summoned once more by his master.

"Joseph," said the painter, "tell these gentlemen that I am thirsty, and ask them to oblige you with a little water."

M. Delange at once handed a leather bottle to the servant, who, faithful to his principles, but in a greater fright than ever, once more essayed to cross the open space. Alas! this double journey, this gymnastic encore, was too much for the few and weakened fastenings of Joseph's inexpressibles. The wretched man perceived that his last and only garment, for his shirt did not count, was on the point of deserting him. He made a supreme effort, and whilst with one hand he grasped the leathern water bottle, with the other he did his best to hold up the necessary article of his attire.

This truly picturesque attitude, his desperate struggles and his terrified air were too much for the Bedouins, who broke out into shouts of laughter until the tears ran down their faces, and they laid their guns on the pommels of their saddles, so that they might hold their shaking sides.

The moment was admirably chosen for the execution of M. de Morin's design. At a preconcerted signal, whilst two of the strongest men held the chief in an iron grasp and prevented his making the slightest movement, the other horsemen, with remarkable precision, sprang across the space which intervened between them and M. de Morin, hurled back his guard, formed a circle round him, drew him backwards, and resumed their former position.

The Nomads laughed no longer, but they seemed utterly stupified. Their prisoner had, as it were, been conjured away—they could not understand it one bit, and, though they brandished their spears and poured out threats by the bushel, they half believed that the Europeans were either sorcerers or beings of another world.

"Now there is not a moment to lose," said the young painter, when he found himself in the midst of his own people. "There is too much anxiety in Djiddah about our fate to warrant our staying here for ever."

"We ask nothing better than to get away, my dear fellow," said M. Delange, "but if we turn our backs on these savages, or cease to have them under our rifles, they will fire upon us."

"You forget our safeguard, their chief," replied M. de Morin. "Where is Ali, the interpreter?"

"Here I am," said Ali, stepping to the front.

"Come along, then. I want to hold a parley with the chief, and you must repeat to him exactly what I say."

Whilst the Nomads were consulting amongst themselves, and, apparently, meditating an attack, M. de Morin thus addressed their leader—

"You have behaved scandalously to me! When I was dragged into your camp, I threw myself on your protection and I offered to pay you a large ransom if you would let me rejoin my friends. Not content with rejecting my offer, you allowed me to be insulted and ill-treated. You deserve a severe punishment, but I pardon you—on one condition—that we are allowed to depart, and that you go with us. At the gates of Djiddah, oblivious of your wrong-doing, I will restore to you your liberty—I swear it—if we have no farther cause of complaint against you or your men. Ten of them may follow us, and they will serve as an escort to bring you back. But if they utter a sound on the journey, if they indulge in a single threat, both they and you will perish. However you may decide, in five minutes we set out."

The Bedouin, after a moment's consideration and a careful scrutiny of the arms of the Europeans, spoke to his men, and an animated conversation took place between them. The interpreters alleged that the views of the chief were pacific, but that several amongst the

younger members of the clan hesitated to fall in with them. At length these latter appeared to yield, and the captive chief, turning to M. de Morin, said—

"Let us start. I trust to your word, and you may trust to mine."

"Agreed," replied the young Frenchman. "But as I am on foot, as well as my servant, a circumstance which will retard our journey and yours, bring out two of your horses. We will return them to you, rest assurred. We, at all events, are not thieves."

The chief gave the necessary orders, but they were only half obeyed. The horse borrowed by M. de Morin on the previous evening from Abou-Zamil was brought out for him, but a camel was offered to Joseph. At the sight of this beast, the unfortunate servant nearly fainted.

"No, no," cried he, "I had rather follow you on foot. No camel for me, no camel for me."

"If you follow us afoot," observed his master, "we shall not reach Djiddah in three days. It is out of the question."

Fortunately, the interpreter Omar, accustomed from his childhood to a camel, gave up his horse to Joseph and took the despised steed.

The little band of Europeans, composed of ten persons, including the chief, who was carefully guarded by two horsemen in the centre of the troop, took the road to Djiddah.

Ten Bedouins, as had been agreed upon, followed them at a short distance.

CHAPTER XXX.

FROM MISS BEATRICE POLES TO MISS EMILY ——.

"He has come back to us! They have all come back to us! I am beside myself, and my heart is overflowing with joy! These men, I tell you, my dear Emily, are splendid! And so modest! If I ask M. de Morin, he refuses to tell me anything about himself. He declares that his adventures amongst the Nomads are not worth the trouble of recounting, and that it was neither more nor less than a trivial excursion, too insignificant even to be mentioned in our diaries of the trip. But, if I mention MM. Périères and Delange, it is quite another thing, and he exclaims at once that they are superb. Delange, he says, for a doctor, is a marvel; he is evidently concealing his past life from us, and he must have served in the Zouaves, or the Chasseurs d'Afrique, a seasoned warrior, with all the discipline of an old soldier and the dashing intrepidity of a young one. As for M. Périères, he says that he does not know which to admire the most in him, his boldness or his coolness in danger.

"Fortunately for us, the journalist and the doctor, in their turn, enlighten us about M. de Morin, who, they affirm, is a prodigy of reck-

lessness, patience, dash, courage and energy. His good temper and spirits never deserted him, and it is to these qualities alone, so these two gentlemen say, that they owe their escape, safe and sound, from their terrible adventure.

"It appears that whilst on the road to Djiddah, our caravan encountered fresh dangers. The Bedouins who followed them were on the point of attacking them, but the good temper and self-possession of M. de Morin gained the day. Would you believe, dearest, that he actually succeeded in securing a meal for himself and his men, of which they stood in great need, I assure you? They halted about two in the afternoon at a sort of oasis which they came across on the road, and there they breakfasted, pistol in hand, be it remembered. Joseph waited upon both Europeans and Bedouins, and these latter individuals were in convulsions of laughter, which you would readily understand if I had given you all the details of this memorable expedition. I am, however, habitually discursive in my letters, and I invariably leave plenty of gaps. But, then, I always imagine that you are at my side as I write, and that you must have heard all that has reached my ears.

"This breakfast seems to have been a very curious affair. The Bedouin women had prepared on the previous evening a supply of couscoussou, the favourite dish of the Arabs, and, like good managers, they had, at the moment of departure, put in the saddle-bags a sufficiency for the needs of their own people.

Our friends, having tasted it, found it excellent, and as a *quid pro quo*, they presented the Bedouins with some excellent tobacco and cigars, and so put them in a good humour. But the acme of their enjoyment was to come. Breakfast over, M. de Morin expressed his intention of having a snooze, very natural under the circumstances, when M. Delange said to him—

"'Pardon me, but before going to sleep, we must turn our attention to a game at cards. We have not had one to-day, and if we get on horseback it will be difficult. This, as I take it, is a very opportune moment.'

"'But I am dead sleepy,' said the young painter, trying to get out of it.

"'So am I,' replied M. Delange, 'but a quarter of an hour's rest will only make us melancholy. So long as we cannot sleep for twenty-four or thirty-six hours at a stretch, we had better not sleep at all. Come along, and whilst our camels are trying to find a blade or two of grass, we will have just one game at écarté, if you have no objection.'

"'Surely you did not think of bringing any cards with you?' said M. de Morin.

"'They are the only things, on the contrary, I remembered. I forgot water, biscuits, everything except cards.'

"'Very well,' replied the painter, resigned to his lot.

"They sat down, face to face, cross-legged on the sand, and the Bedouins, deeply interested in

this novel proceeding, grouped themselves round the pair. When they saw the little red and black pips, the kings, queens, and knaves mixed, jumbled up together, and falling one on the top of another, they were seized afresh with a fit of laughter, not even inferior to that which Joseph had provoked.

"The game was no sooner over than they laid hands on the cards, anxious to fathom the secrets of the game, and M. Delange generously gave them up.

"Our poor companions were worn out with fatigue when they rejoined us at the Consulate. But our joy at seeing them once more reanimated them.

"'Ah! Miss Poles, in seeing you I lose all thought of sleep,' said M. Delange. The doctor is charming. I no longer grudge him his passion for gambling. I have come to the pass, I confess, of loving even his faults.

"The French Consul was delighted at the success achieved by his fellow-countrymen, but he advised us to quit Djiddah as soon as possible. He feared lest, jealous of our triumph, and ashamed of their own inertness and impotence, the Turkish authorities should try to excite some unpleasant feeling, or induce the populace to fix a quarrel upon us.

"'You must never forget,' he said, 'so long as you are in a Mussulman country, the well-known proverb, 'The body of an unbeliever is not worth the trouble taken by a jackal to eat it!'

"On the quay we met the Bedouin, Abou-Zamil, waiting to claim his reward, which M. Périères gave him at once. It is ill-placed generosity, but Europeans are bound to teach these barbarians that their word is as good as their bond.

"Our steamer started as soon as we got on board, and the French flag at the Consulate was dipped in our honour.

"We are now making direct for Souakim, and we have to cross the Red Sea at its greatest breadth, whilst bearing at the same time several degrees southwards."

CHAPTER XXXI.

FROM M. DE MORIN TO M. DE POMMERELLE.

"I ASKED Périères to narrate to you our adventure with the Arabs, and to depict for your benefit the dance of the bayaderes. He had to deal with stirring scenes and picturesque effects, and, being a literary man, could impart to them both interest and colouring. For the present, however, there is nothing to do but to send you a few sketches of the country through which we have been passing for the last few days, and that is a work which I can safely undertake without the risk of boring you. Do not expect anything from me but a sort of itinerary, some passing notes of our journey from my pen, or, rather, my pencil, jotted down at the road-side, with my knees for a table, and at the end of a long day's march.

"Only, my dear fellow, you may rely upon my being always matter-of-fact and veracious, for I am not up to either invention or exaggeration, even for the sake of pleasing or interesting you. And, besides, you may easily verify my accounts by consulting those of the travellers who have passed along the same route, from Souakim by Berber to Khartoum, Combes in 1834, Beurmann in 1860, Heuglin

in 1864, Schweinfurth in 1866, and bear in mind that Berber is called El-Mecheref by the English, and El-Mecherif by the Germans.

"I omit altogether the other routes taken from Souakim to Khartoum, for some travellers have reached the Nile from the south, without touching at Berber. Werne in 1841, Baker in 1861, and Lejean in 1864, went down the Red Sea as far as Massouah, and reached Khartoum by Keren, Kassala and the Blue Nile.

"All these districts, you must know, are under Egyptian rule, and form part of Eastern or Egyptian Soudan. No very extraordinary adventures can, consequently, be expected just yet, but they will come later on, at least we will hope so. There is a time for all things, says the proverb. Have patience, and as soon as ever the unforeseen and the marvellous afford scope for soul-stirring description, I will yield the pen to Périères and you shall be happy.

"For the time being we have only to deal with a country already half-civilized, where Turkish and Egyptian customs prevail, where there is a talk of constructing a railway, and where, horrible to relate, the telegraph is in full swing. So you see, we are not yet amongst the savages, and you would not thank me for discounting the interesting things in store for you.

"On the 6th November, 1872, we landed at Souakim, where, thanks to the Governor, Muntas-Bey, a charming man, by-the-way, we were enabled to lodge both ourselves and our servants in a tolerably presentable brick house.

"I must tell you that Souakim has become a place of considerable importance since Egypt acquired it from Turkey, and became its sovereign mistress. There is actually a bakery in it, an inestimable boon in a country where, ten years ago, the Governor alone ate wheaten bread. But, from a moral point of view, the most complete change in Souakim has been brought about by the new aqueduct. The women will no longer be beasts of burden, destined to seek for water outside the town, and the Bedouin will have other things to think of than the capture of some poor slave-girl, to fill the degrading post of water-carrier. You cannot imagine how sad a sight it is to a European to see these old women, often infirm, wearily dragging themselves along the deep and burning sand, with heavy water-bottles on their heads. Nor are the young and pretty spared; their flexible figures, their backs still weak, are bowed, beneath their heavy burden, and remain so. Why, you will say, are not animals employed on this work? For the simple reason that they are more expensive to keep than slaves.

"Other customs have also undergone considerable modification since the country has been annexed by Egypt. Our European dress, which formerly would have caused a regular commotion, now scarcely attracts any attention. I do not mean to say by this that the Europeans and Egyptians are in a majority here. In the rainy season, hosts of Bedouins, followed by their flocks and herds, come down from the

neighbouring mountains, and pitch their tents to the south of the town. But that is more like a suburb situated on the mainland, because Souakim proper is on an island, and it is in this part alone that any noteworthy buildings are to be seen, such as the custom house, the English postal telegraph office, the divan and a few mosques. Of gardens, both public and private, there is an absolute dearth, and I have only been able to discover one solitary clump of date-palms, maintaining a struggling existence in the courtyard of a former Governor. To make up for this want of attraction, we have enough and to spare of the sun, and the heat is so great that we are longing, I can assure you, to get to the mountains.

"We are waiting only for camels and drivers, and it is not an easy matter to procure either, the drivers especially, seeing that every day seems to make them more extortionate and intractable. In consequence of the horror which Joseph now has of a camel, I have been obliged to procure him another sort of conveyance. It is a donkey, strong enough to carry his hulking body, but so small that his rider's legs almost touch the ground and make the animal appear six-footed. Joseph objects to the very mention of a bûrnus ever since his mishap, and he has invented for himself a fanciful costume, which, when he is mounted on his ass, gives him a resemblance to Sancho Panza. Please do not on that account, attempt to confound his master, physically, with Don

Quixote, although, morally, I should be flattered by the comparison.

"Miss Beatrice Poles will have nothing to say to camel, horse, mule, or ass. 'I have my feet,' she says, 'they are quite enough for me, and I am only too happy to make use of them. You will never have to wait for me, for I shall go ever so much faster than you. A caravan, in these parts, is just like a lot of tortoises marching in single file, one after another.'

"Our camels, twenty in number, will therefore be reserved for our two interpreters, the three Nubian women-servants, and our personal luggage, the remainder of the luggage having, as I have already told you, been sent on direct to Khartoum. Excuse all these details, they are absolutely necessary if you wish to understand our trip and to follow us.

"We calculate on reaching the Nile, without hurrying ourselves, in about a fortnight. Beurman estimates the distance from Souakim to Berber at one hundred and thirteen hours' travelling, and Heuglin at one hundred and eight, much about the same thing. Schweinfurth calculates by miles, and puts it down at seventy-five. Do not forget, for it is a detail of great importance, that marine miles are meant, sixty to the degree, and representing 1,952 metres. You must not, as is so often done, confound the mile with the kilometre."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"We are off; the camels are loaded, and the drivers, armed with sticks, are beside them. Madame de Guéran is mounted on her mule, our two friends and myself on horseback, Joseph on his ass, and the remainder of the servants on their more gigantic steeds. Miss Poles, in a most picturesque travelling costume, with a cap on her head, a large green veil, a plaid round her body, a whole heap of useful articles pendant from a belt, her dress hooked up, and her huge feet in yellow boots and gaiters, moves to and fro, here, there, and everywhere, gives a piece of her mind to one person, and an order to another, and winds up by setting out at the head of the caravan.

"'Good heavens!' says Delange, 'in that get-up she will scare away all the birds, and they tell me there are some splendid specimens to be seen on the road!'

"Some Arabs appeared to say good-bye to us, and overwhelmed us with their *Kattar-Kherak* (may God increase your happiness); we reply to their bows and scrapes in our most courtly fashion, and off we go.

"Before leaving Souakim we pass by the Foullah, the suburb favoured by the Nomads.

They live in a camp composed of tents made of matting, and held up by poles of acacia-wood. Several of these people came to the side of the road to wish us a pleasant and prosperous journey. We noticed that their bûrnus differed from those worn by the inhabitants of the towns, being of some dark material, instead of white, and consequently not so liable to be soiled. Miss Poles, who was walking close to me, and never lets anything escape her, pointed out to me several very handsome men, of dignified mien, and small, but strongly-marked features.

"After leaving the town we came to a large plain, between the sea and the mountain ranges, interspersed here and there with enormous rocks of blackish hue, which every now and then bar our progress and cause us to make a *détour*. On the way I amused myself by watching our camels, and I find that they take from seventy to seventy-five paces per minute, and that if you hit them or shout at them, they do not increase the number but the length of their stride. You can see by this that Miss Poles, with her stilts, will have no difficulty in keeping up with us.

"Soon we begin the ascent of the mountain-range, the temperature changes almost at once, and, in spite of the sun, some puffs of fresh air meet us in the face and revive our energies, weakened by the suffocating heat of Souakim.

"The evening closes in and the day's work is over for us, our retinue, and our animals.

The baggage is unloaded and carefully stacked with the double object of rendering theft difficult and forming an intrenchment round ourselves. Whilst the camels seek a repast in the neighhouring plain, their masters collect a few branches and, having made a fire with them, proceed to cook their evening meal, consisting of parched durra.

"We are more luxurious, and have made up our minds to feast sumptuously after this first day's march. Our choicest provisions are spread out on the grass, a few bottles of our finest vintage find themselves minus their corks, and we sit down to table—that is to say, we take our seats on saddles, packs, cases, or bales. Never, my dear fellow, was there such a cheerful meal. What the future has in store for us I know not, but, to quote the old proverb, this is so much saved from the enemy.

"We are on a plateau of remarkable fertility. Delange, very strong on botany, is in his element. He calls our attention to some magnificent dragon-trees, superb dracænæ, euphorbiæ, aloes, and gigantic tufts of salvadora. All these plants, crowded together and in full growth and bloom, clothe the verdant plain. The camphor tree, mint, and thyme fill the air with their fragrance, whilst the stars are just beginning to twinkle over our heads, and the moon, half hidden by the neighbouring mountain, sends us her rays of clearest light. It is like a July or August night in France. Nothing is wanting, for even the field-crickets are

chirping down below there by the side of a track worn across the plain.

Whilst we thus give ourselves up to the enjoyment of the climate and the scenery, our tents are being pitched and furnished, for, after much wise counsel, we have, in order to protect ourselves from the dampness of the ground, brought with us several sets of frame work called *angareb*, on four legs, and covered with a sort of lattice, made of thongs of bullock's hide; a mat placed on this frame serves as a mattress. You see, my dear fellow, that we have all our little comforts round us, and that we have no reason whatever to hanker after those pretty little boudoirs which it is your wont to frequent.

"We are at Singate, the summer residence of the inhabitants of Souakim, and an encampment of the Bedouins, of the tribe of Bischaris, commonly called Bisharcen, situate in a large valley, shut in by the loftiest links in the mountain chain. Singate is considered as being one of the healthiest places in the country. The Governor of Souakim, when he came to say good-bye to us, told us that he would order his own residence to be placed at our disposal, and consequently we have in attendance upon us the commandant of the little Egyptian garrison which protects the district, and the greatest respect is paid to us.

"Our dinner is served under a sammor, an immense specimen of the acacia genus, whose branches extend far out and droop downwards in the shape of a parasol. The Commandant,

during the evening, thought fit to present to us two Abyssinian ladies, whom a love of travel had brought to the Soudan. They belong to the upper ten. I was on the point of saying that they were women of the world. Their features are delicate, and approach the European type, their lips thick, without, however, reminding one of those of a negress, their teeth brilliantly white, their noses long and thin, and their complexion a golden yellow. Delange will persist in saying that they have lovely figures, but that impressionable young man was so smitten with the bayaderes that he is always thinking he sees replicas, so to speak, of those wonderful beings, who appear to have been an epoch in his life. I am quite content with giving you their portraits, and so I will complete them. They walk bare-footed, according to the custom of their country, where a Princess here and there alone allows herself such a luxury as red leather slippers, and their black hair shines so in the sun that I asked the Commandant to explain the phenomenon to me. He made no scruple about telling me that in order to obtain this sheen, which is quite the fashion, they put a small piece of butter on their heads, and this, melting quickly, anoints their hair from its roots to their shoulders inclusive.

"The Doctor who, I thought, would be interested in this little detail, did not seem in the least degree affected by it, and, in spite of the melted butter, to which, in his admiration, he shuts both his eyes and his nose,

flirts desperately with both the fair strangers, to the great disgust of Miss Beatrice Poles.

* * * * * *

"This morning, when we wanted to start from the Wady Kokreb, near which we had passed the night, it was impossible to find Miss Poles. We shouted, we searched, we sent the interpreters out in all directions, but in vain—no one could give us any tidings of her. A camel driver said that he had been awake nearly all night, and that he had not seen her go into her tent.

"Has she been carried off by some too inflammable Bedouins?

"That would indeed be a misfortune—for them."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"We waited one hour more for Miss Beatrice Poles, and then we gave the order to start.

"Had she not told us over and over again never to be anxious on her account, that she was not the sort of woman to lose herself, and that, if she did, she would very easily find herself again? However, it was by no means probable that she had retraced her steps. It was far more likely that, under the influences of one of those impulses to which she is subject, or of a locomotive fit which she could not repress, she had set off in the middle of the night, and was now ahead of the caravan. We had, therefore, a much better chance of finding her by continuing our journey than if we remained stationary.

"Nevertheless, we could not shake off our feelings of anxiety, for Miss Poles, despite her eccentricities and her ridiculousness, is such a thoroughly good creature, and so courageous a woman, that she has quite won us over. So, when Périères proposed to me that we should gallop on in search of our companion, I jumped at the idea, and we left the caravan for several hours under the command of Madame de Guéran and the Doctor.

"We did not run any risk of losing our way.

The Wady Kokreb, which we had just left, is at the entrance of a narrow valley, very easy to follow. Two lofty mountains, Badab on the right, and Wowinte on the left, imprisoned us after a fashion and showed us the way.

"We galloped along, for two hours at least, on an extensive plain, and, as we could not see a single break in the horizon, we were beginning to be seriously alarmed, when Périères rode up along side me and said—

"'Don't you see something down there at the bottom of the valley? Is it a tree, a rock, or a human being?'

"'It moves, whatever it is,' I replied, after a moment's examination.

"'Yes,' replied Périères, 'I think it does. Let us ride down this side. We shall, no doubt, find ourselves in the presence of some Bedouin, but we are already capable of saying a word or two of Arabic, and by supplementing them with a few expressive gestures, we shall obtain some information about the fugitive.'

"Without waiting for my reply, our friend made for the spot which he had been the first to discover, and I followed him.

"We were not mistaken. It was a human being, but of which sex? That we could not divine, as at a distance the bûrnus of an Arab might easily be mistaken for a woman's skirt. Anxious to settle this point without delay, we pushed on at an increased rate, but very soon we were obliged to confess, to our great astonishment, that we gained but little on the pursued.

That the being was on foot was evident, but its pace was surprising.

"At length our suspense was at an end. It was Miss Poles, marching on in a quick time peculiar to herself and unknown to our finest troops, with an enormous stride, springy, rapid, but at the same time wonderfully regular.

"The whole of her body seemed to merge into her feet, and they never appeared to touch the ground, or to be together, but flew and whirled about to such an extent that it made one giddy to look at them. It was not a woman, it was the wandering Jew, traversing the earth, overleaping space, escalading mountains, striding over river and sea, passing from one pole to the other.

"And the nearer we approached, the faster went Miss Poles. Did she wish to flee from us? Was she pitting her speed against that of our horses, and did she think she could beat them? She could not hope to beat them for a short distance on the flat, but, perhaps, she thought her staying power was greater than theirs, and that over a long course she would wear them down.

"'Miss Poles! Miss Poles!' exclaimed Périères, 'for heaven's sake stop! Our horses will break down, and we shall never get to the end of our journey!'

"She did not even condescend to turn her head, but went on just the same, straight ahead, mechanically, for all the world like an automaton.

"'She is wound up for twenty-four hours,'

said Périères, 'and if the main-spring does not smash, there will be no stopping her. We must smash her main-spring.'

"'So let us do,' said I.

"We set spurs to our horses, dashed on about thirty yards past Miss Poles, and then, suddenly wheeling round, we bore down upon her.

"Impassible as ever, her long body, like a paper spill, glided between our horses, and on she went without the slightest deviation or alteration of her course.

"We had to begin again.

"After giving our steeds a little breathing time we set off once more in pursuit.

"This time, when we got up to her, Périères attacked on her right, and I on her left, each of us simultaneously seizing an arm.

"The main-spring gave way, it was true, but it went on from force of habit, and made one revolution more. She dragged us onward for about half-a-score yards, and our horses, in spite of our efforts to stop them, could not resist the impetus.

"At last she stopped. With a sudden wrench she disengaged her two arms from our grasp, and crossing them on her breast, she said in an angry tone—

"'What do you want?'

"We were non-plussed. What was the matter with her? Why did she speak to us in that way? Why cast on us such furious glances from behind her blue spectacles?

"I replied timidly—

"'Miss Poles, we were anxious about you, and did not know what had become of you.'

"'Ah!' said she, bitterly, 'you are anxious about me now that those Abyssinians no longer form part of the caravan.'

"This was a revelation for Périères.

"The Abyssinians had, in fact, asked, when we left Singate, permission to proceed with us as far as Kokreb. We willingly gave our consent, and they availed themselves of it in the most considerate manner possible, keeping themselves to themselves throughout the journey. But, very probably, during the evening we passed near the Wady Kokreb, Delange, ever eager in the pursuit of knowledge, paid the Abyssinians a visit for the purpose of obtaining from them some information about their country. Miss Poles, whose heart, after having for a long time wavered between Delange, Périères, and myself, had appeared of late to be fixed on the Doctor, had naturally suffered cruelly at finding herself neglected for these strangers, and in her spite, anger, and despair, she had hurled herself into space to get out of the way of the faithless one.

"Her first answer to our further questions was enough to convince us that we were not mistaken.

"'But, Miss Poles,' we asked, 'why go so fast, and fatigue yourself to such an extent?'

"'To tire out my body,' she replied, casting down her eyes; 'bodily suffering sometimes has the effect of relieving the soul's agony.'

"'You suffer then?' asked Périères, trying to keep his countenance.

"'Suffer!' she exclaimed.

"At the same time, as if to call heaven to witness, she turned her eyes upward, and we saw the eye-lashes of her upper lids standing straight out above her spectacles.

"'Miss Poles,' I resumed in a mild tone, 'it is not right to flee from your friends because you are suffering. Périères and I have not done anything, and yet, ever since this morning you have put us in a terrible state of anxiety about you.'

"'It is true,' said she, touched by my eloquence. 'I have been unjust. Forgive me.'

"She put out her hand, and we shook it heartily.

"'Suppose,' suggested Périères, 'that whilst we are waiting for the caravan we take a short rest below there, under that magnificent sammor, which reminds me of the one in the garden of the Governor of Singate? We know that you are not tired, Miss Poles, but our horses are blown, and I am sure you will have mercy on them.'

"'Be it so!' she replied, 'especially as I am rather hungry!'

"'Our ride has given us an appetite, too, but all the provisions are with the camels.'

"'Oh!' she replied, with a still broken voice, 'I always carry my lunch with me.'

"She produced a sort of cartridge-box, which she carried on her belt, wherein was a supply

of excellent viands, and we soon came to the conclusion that if her heart was affected, her digestion was unimpaired.

"When our caravan appeared in sight, Périères mounted his steed and trotted off to tell Madame de Guéran that her travelling companion had been recovered.

"As soon as I was alone with Miss Poles, I made a trial of moral homœopathy; I put in force the system of like to like, *similia similibus*. I tried to cure her one love by another, and to substitute our friend Périères for the too volatile Delange. It was doing poor Périères a shabby turn, but it was absolutely necessary to console our companion and to replace one weakness by another. I sang the praises of Périères to such an extent; I depicted him in such tender, sentimental, plaintive colours; I so delicately hinted at a supposititious weakness on his part for Miss Poles, that at the end of an hour's conversation, a smile once more spread itself over our Englishwoman's lips, and her heart caught glimpses of a new horizon.

"'All right, my friend,' said Périères, when he heard how I had disposed of him, 'I owe you one for that.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"At our evening's halting place, near the well of Roway, the inhabitants of a neighbouring encampment very unexpectedly made an inroad upon us in search of medicine.

"This was a matter for Delange, and he entered thoroughly into the spirit of the thing, causing the people to form a circle round him, and endeavouring, with the assistance of an interpreter, to question each one in turn about the particular malady from which he imagined himself to be suffering. But the Doctor's new patients spoke all at once, with no end of gesticulations and shouting. They pushed, they struggled, they hustled each other, they fought for the position nearest to the Doctor, and to attract his attention. It was an awful row, a regular hubbub, a riot in fact.

"Our friend very soon saw that doctoring in earnest was out of the question, and therefore, in order to get rid of these people, show them his good will, and at the same time play his part as medical adviser, he ordered them all simultaneously to put out their tongues. They obeyed. Thirty tongues of all shapes, sizes, and hues were at one and the same time pointed at the Doctor. He inspected the whole line

with the utmost gravity, his patients remaining during the whole process open-mouthed, and with their tongues, as the soldiers say, at the 'ready.' He then sent to his tent for a leather bag, labelled 'medicine,' and from it he took a small box filled with Cockle's pills, one of which he solemnly dropped down each expectant throat.

"During this operation we heard him murmur these words, which his patients evidently looked upon as an incantation. 'If it does not do you any good, it will do you no harm.'

"We could not restrain our laughter, but these unsophisticated beings, perfectly satisfied, returned to their encampment, showering blessings on the Doctor's head, and we were left to our well-earned repose.

"To-day, ever since sunrise, the heat has been stifling, one of our horses seems out of sorts, and Joseph's ass, weary of his rider, is wallowing on the plain and obstinately refuses to be coaxed on to his legs again. Our camel-drivers, too, have turned sulky, and, instead of assembling their beasts as usual, loading them, and putting them in marching order, they are chattering, quarrelling amongst themselves, and wasting their time and ours. They might very well be supposed to have entered into a compact with the sun, the horse, and the ass, to make sure of a day's rest, or, at all events, to delay us on our journey to the extent of one stage.

"'Shall we give in to them this once?' proposed Madame de Guéran.

"'It would be a bad precedent,' said Périères.

"'Never mind that,' I replied, 'I will undertake to re-establish discipline whenever it may be necessary.'

"'Very well,' replied the Baroness, 'but so that we may not appear to be frightened of them, let us anticipate their wish, and give them, of our own free will, the holiday they seem to want.'

"'In that case what are we to do with ourselves this morning?' asked the Doctor. 'If I only had as many patients as I had last night! But my treatment has, no doubt, cured them, and they will not return.'

"'I propose,' said Miss Poles, 'that we should make the ascent of that magnificent mountain which overhangs the valley. The map I have before me styles it Djebel-Gurrat, and the inhabitants of this region call it Beit-el-Pharaon, the House of Pharaoh. It is a granite rock, they say, and remarkable for its numerous natural reservoirs. It is only a two hours' walk, and, in the meantime, both servants and animals can rest.'

"'The suggestion of Miss Poles is an excellent one,' said Périères, 'and we may as well take advantage of this opportunity of visiting one of the last mountains we shall come across.'

"All five of us were soon on the move, accompanied by our interpreter, Ali, and two Bedouins, who knew the country and carried our lunch.

"Joseph, as might have been expected, had, at the last moment, begged to be excused from this walk, and we left him tranquilly reposing close to his donkey.

"The mountain, like most other mountains, was much farther from us than we thought it was, and the heat grew so intense as to be almost unbearable. But we were determined not to be daunted by any obstacles, but, in view of what we had to undergo, to inure ourselves to the fatigue of walking and the burning rays of the sun. Towards one o'clock in the afternoon, when we had calculated on returning from our expedition, we had only reached the first precipitous slopes of the Djebel-Gurrat, and as we were climbing the ascent the two Bedouins called our attention to some heavy clouds which were gathering in the horizon, and attempted to dissuade us from proceeding any farther. Our only answer was to order one of these men to show us the way, and the other to return to our camp and bring to the foot of the mountain five camels to carry us back thence, when our excursion was over. By so doing we were able to reconcile our upward ideas with the consideration due to limbs destined, as ours were, to severe exertions.

"The sky grew more and more overcast as we toiled up the mountain, but, at the same time, the clouds held out a promise of refreshing rain, over which our hearts rejoiced in advance.

"'What a jolly shower-bath we shall have,' exclaimed Périères.

"'I am delighted at the prospect,' said Delange, 'and it seems to me that I am cooler already. What a marvellous thing imagination is!'

"It was no imagination! Atmospheric currents, heralds of the storm, were refreshing the air, and very soon the thunder, which had been rumbling in the distance for an hour past, became louder and louder, each clap taken up by all the echoes of the hill, and reverberating incessantly.

"Close on the thunder followed the wind, bursting its bonds with irresistible impetuosity, and hurling around us stones and masses of rock. The clouds had come down from their lofty eminence, and reaching the ledge on which we stood, surrounded us with vapour and enveloped us in gloom.

"All nature seemed to bend, and break, and succumb under the violence of the hurricane; and, lost as we were, in the midst of this enormous mass of granite, blocks of which were every now and then detached from the main rock, we were in imminent danger.

"The gale passed over our heads without touching us, but fresh clouds appeared and burst into torrents of water. Our interpreter, Ali, who had left us for a few moments, now hurried towards us. He had found a shelter, and led us to it. It was one of those natural reservoirs of which we had been told, a cavity several yards deep and wide, and overhung by a rock. This yawning cavern was perfectly

dry, and a natural projection here and there afforded an easy means of descent.

"The two ladies, accompanied by Périères and the Doctor, followed Ali without hesitation, congratulating him on his discovery.

"'Are you not coming, too?' called out Périères to me.

"'No,' said I, 'I have no love for caverns. And, besides, I am wet through already, so why should I take shelter?'

"I remained on the ledge, some twenty yards from the cavern in which my friends had found refuge.

"The rain fell with redoubled force, the darkness increased, and the hurricane, which had apparently left us, came back upon us with more menacing and impetuous fury. Suddenly I heard a fearful crash, whole trunks of trees were carried past me down the mountain, and, at the same time, a huge volume of water, bursting through all the obstacles which had confined it to the higher level, rushed down with lightning speed, and poured itself headlong into the reservoir where my friends had taken shelter.

"You would have rushed to their assistance, would you not? I fell on my knees, hurled down by the tempest, crushed with grief, mad with despair."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"I soon recovered from my passing weakness, and, crawling on my hands and knees, I made my way, as quickly as possible, to the reservoir, and, as I feared, the grave of my friends.

"The flood, now that it had vanquished every obstacle, seemed to have abated its fury. A moment before, it had thrown me down to the ground and carried me away; now it drew me onwards and swept me along its granite bed, but I was master of it. I did not lose my breath, and I was no longer helpless.

"When I reached the reservoir I clung to the trunk of a tree which had been overthrown by the hurricane and I peered down into the whirlpool.

"It was surging, boiling, lashing itself into fury against the walls of its prison, and looked like some sea let loose by the tempest, which, confined once more in limits too narrow for it, sought for freedom.

"And in this whirlpool I saw nothing—nothing; the dead bodies of my friends rose not to the surface, were nowhere to be seen. Some eddy, doubtless, had formed and held them captive below.

"Ah! there was no hesitation now. I have told you that I was mad with grief. I had but

one wish—to join them, to be buried with them in their watery grave.

"But, at the very moment when my hands were loosening their grasp of the tree they had so eagerly clutched, at the very moment when my body hung over the abyss, I heard a voice. I stopped and listened.

"It was Ali calling me.

"What was he to me? More fortunate, more calculating than my companions, he doubtless had not taken refuge in the cavern and was saved.

"Once more I hung over the abyss, but fresh voices sounded on my ear, a few paces from me, as if from the ledge I had just left.

"I listened—it was Delange's voice—and then Périères spoke.

"How came they there, behind me, instead of being below my feet, at the bottom of the abyss? By what miracle had they been saved?

"I could not think—I imagined I was dreaming—I was mad.

"I turned round, crying out, 'here I am, here I am!' and toiled painfully up towards the ledge, struggling now against the current, but buoyed up with hope and courage.

"At last I managed to crawl out of the bed which the torrent had hollowed out, I stood once more on my feet, and made my way towards the place whence the voices came.

"I saw Périères and Delange.

"As soon as they caught sight of me they rushed towards me.

"'Ah!' I exclaimed, looking round in all directions, and with my voice trembling with emotion, 'Madame de Guéran is not with you! She has perished?'

"'No, no,' said Périères, 'she is saved!'

"'Nobody has perished,' added Delange, 'neither Madame de Guéran, nor Miss Poles!'

"'Where are they?' I asked.

"'Close by, under the care of our guide; they are bruised and battered about, but they have not sustained any serious injury.'

"Then I raised my eyes to look at our two friends, and I saw that their hands and faces were bleeding.

"'What is the matter with you? What has happened?' I exclaimed. 'Tell me all—I do not understand. Is it really you? Are you alive, and how is it that you, by some blessed chance, were able to leave the cavern, without my seeing you, before that terrible accident happened? And, then, how comes this blood, these wounds? Why are you hurt?'

"'We were under the rock, in the reservoir,' said Périères.

"'Impossible.'

"'Quite true,' said Delange.

"'But how?'

"'How?' he replied. 'At the bottom of the reservoir, and at one end there is a large opening, a sort of subterranean passage debouching on to a lower ledge. The torrent, rushing into the cavern, hurled us towards this opening, dragged us into the passage, and, after a second

or two, threw us back, half-suffocated, wounded, bleeding, as you see us, but alive—very much alive, as you may perceive.'

"I began to understand, my head became clearer, I could collect my ideas, and I had no more fear for my reason.

"'You are certain,' said I, 'that Madame de Guéran is not seriously injured?'

"'I assure you,' replied Delange, 'that her forehead and wrists alone are hurt. Miss Poles has always some plaister with her (rather stiff from the bath it has had), and at this moment she is dressing the wounds of the Baroness as skilfully as I could do it myself.'

"'And you may add,' continued Périères, looking at me with a somewhat mournful smile, 'that Madame de Guéran is very anxious about you, my dear friend, and is wondering if you have not been crushed by the trees, carried away by the torrent, and, moreover, has insisted on our coming to look after you.'

"'Then,' I exclaimed, 'let us hasten to set her mind at rest.'

"'Come along, my rival,' whispered Périères to me.

"But as he spoke, his unwounded hand sought mine, as if the brave fellow were asking for pardon for the momentary impulse of jealousy to which he had given way.

"'Ah,' said I, as we all made our way towards the lower ledge, 'your safety is indeed, a source of joy to me; but I should be happier still if it were not for one thing—I have a

revenge to take, and I do not see my way to it.'

"'You have plenty of time before you,' replied Périères; 'our *rôle* will, perhaps, speedily be reversed, and you will be the foremost.'

"'That is what I long for.'

"'De Morin,' said Delange, suddenly, 'suppose we have our little game?'

"'Surely, Doctor, you are not serious?' said I.

"'No, my dear fellow, I am too damp.'

"'And a good thing, too,' I replied; 'for if you had been in earnest I would have throttled you, and so have got rid, once and for all, of you and your cards. I have no right to break my word, or to fail to carry out my engagement, but nothing prevents my putting an end to you.'

"'Nothing, I admit. Only, you would not be placed in such an extremity. You lost yesterday, and it is I who have to meet your wishes.'

"'True, I forgot it. Then I substitute a bet for the cards.'

"'What?'

"'That I will reach the rock near which I see Madame de Guéran before you do.'

"'Done,' said Delange, 'it will warm me.'

"He started off in the required direction in such earnest as to convince me that, however seriously his hands and face were damaged, his legs were intact. I left off running, for I did not want to come upon Madame de Guéran like an avalanche, though I was very anxious that

she should see, as quickly as possible, that I was safe and sound. Delange thus became my unconscious messenger, and his run cost me a thousand francs.

"When I reached Madame de Guéran, in due course, I held out my hands, which she grasped warmly, and as I looked at her I saw that she was pale and agitated.

"'We escaped rather well!' said she, smiling.

"'I thought you were dead,' was my reply.

"'And what would you have done?' said she, turning towards me with that frank look which you one evening noticed.

"'I should have died, too.'

"'Truly?' she asked, still looking at me.

"'Truly.'

"'I believe you,' she said, and she once more held out her hand, which, carried away by an irresistible impulse, I raised to my lips.

"Périères came up at this moment, and then I remembered Miss Poles, who might be hurt at my not having enquired after her. I went to her, and found her sitting, leaning against a rock, with Delange on his knees before her, binding up her foot.

"'Are you hurt?' I asked, concernedly.

"'A sprain,' she replied, and, holding out her foot, she added, with a smile, 'according to my sin am I judged.'

"The storm had passed away, and the sky was as clear and tranquil as it was in the early morn. A glorious sun, which now we blessed,

dried our sodden garments. We commenced the descent, step by step, picking our way cautiously, like people who are not quite sure whether they are alive or not. Miss Poles also retarded our progress, in spite of all her efforts to keep up with us and cause us no inconvenience.

"But the Doctor expressly forbade her walking a single step, and so she was compelled to allow herself to be carried in turn by Ali and the Bedouin, Périères and myself.

"At the foot of the mountain we found the camels, which, by a happy thought, we had ordered. Miss Poles was hoisted, notwithstanding her resistance, on to the back of one of these animals. We mounted the others, and, two hours afterwards, we reached our camp.

"Our three Nubians were asleep, as is their wont, and Joseph was revelling with his donkey on the plain."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"This morning, at daybreak, we commenced our preparations for departure, for, come what may, we must make up the time we have lost.

"Miss Poles is better already, but, nevertheless, we begged her to make use of a camel. As she has but one idea, that of recommencing as soon as possible her gymnastic exercises, she yielded to our entreaties.

"Her long, thin figure, perched perpendicularly on the camel's back, lofty enough by nature, produces the drollest possible effect. But we seize upon the particular weakness of Miss Beatrice, her *amour-propre*, and assure her that her appearance on the gigantic steed is at once full of majesty and grace, and that the camel becomes her admirably.

"The sick horse is also improving, and, as for Joseph's donkey, he spent such a day of luxurious idleness yesterday that his hard-working propensities are again in full swing. Out of pity for the poor beast, weighed down by that lump of vanity, his rider, I have decided that he shall be ridden only a part of the way.

"In case you should be tempted to ask why I do not send this idle servant of mine, so cum-

brous a travelling companion, to the right-about, back again to France, I must recal to your recollection a charming comedy, once performed at the Gymnase, called '*La Voyage de M. Perrichon*,' which is based entirely on the eminently true idea that our attachment for others depends more upon what we do for them than on what they do for us. You will, therefore, readily understand that, having, at the risk of my life, saved Joseph from death or slavery, he has become proportionately dear to me.

"He amuses me, too, I confess, by his mixture of stupidity and self-sufficiency, and I must admit that when, perchance, he does condescend to wait on me, he does it, to use his own expression, in a most correct fashion. It is quite a treat, I assure you, in this country, almost a desert, in the midst of this semi-barbarian existence, and under the tent where I have just passed the night, to set eyes on a clean-shaven, neat-looking valet, with my clothes over his arm, my boots blacked and in his hand, and himself in readiness to give me my slippers. I forget Africa, Bedouins, mountains, camels, my tent, the board which serves me for a bed, and I imagine that I am in the heart of Paris, in the Rue Taitbout, in my own snug little bedroom.

"To-day we have turned our backs upon the verdant plains, the splendid clumps of trees, and all the superb vegetation which has charmed us up to the present time. In the neighbourhood of the well of O-Back (the great well, I mean)

the country is one mass of sand, the precursor of that twenty league desert which we have to traverse before we reach the valley of the Nile. Yes, my dear fellow, twenty leagues of sand, a fine and shifting sand, which the wind, according to its fancy, either leaves as level as a billiard-table, or heaps up in huge hillocks, and which the burning rays of the sun cause to sparkle like mingled particles of gold and silver.

"For three days we passed through these gloomy solitudes, compelled half our time to travel on foot, for our horses sank into the sand up to their knees. Even the camels began to show signs of fatigue; they staggered under their loads, and their drivers, dragging themselves wearily along after them, in vain repeated their customary cry of 'hot, hot, hot,' meant to rouse and stimulate them to fresh exertions.

"In spite of all these delays we reached the well of Abou-Tagger, and, after having come upon an alluvial plain, our eyes rest at last upon the Nile, to which, nearly a month ago, we said *au revoir* at Cairo, about three hundred miles north of our present position. We hasten to the stream with almost childish glee, and we seem as if we have once more met an old friend with whom we are destined to spend many a long day.

"The Nile, out of gratitude, no doubt, for our hearty greeting and effusive welcome, regales us with a curious spectacle. Picture to yourself an *al fresco* washing establishment, a

congregation of copper-coloured washerwomen, young and pretty, and boasting no other garment than a short petticoat reaching from the waist to the knees.

"These pretty girls were doing their washing to an accompaniment of song and dance, using their feet, instead of their hands, as 'dollies' to press out the clothes after they have rinsed them in the river and spread them along the bank. They stand first on one foot and then on the other, never on both at the same time, and stamp in unison in slow and measured time.

"Our arrival did not discompose them in the least; they continued to perform their little operation, laughing the while and showing us their white teeth. This unexpected tableau was all the more pleasing to us, as, since we left Souakim, with the exception of our Abyssinian travellers, we had not met amongst the Bischaris tribes any but very unprepossessing specimens of the female race.

"And so at last we rest at Berber, or El-Mecherif, on the right bank of the Nile, in a real house, a perfect palace to us, in real beds, with real mattresses, an accumulation of comforts which, I assure you, plunges us into a sort of ecstacy.

"And now we see what an able leader we have in Madame de Guéran. With what skill she has traced out our route for us! How well she has prepared us for long journeys and severe exertion! How excellently she has arranged

our various transitions ! If, at one fell swoop, she had compelled us to traverse some far-stretching desert, if she had led us far away from all civilization, straight into the centre of barbarism, without any chance of resuming our wonted habits, she would have run the risk of disgusting some of us. Périères and I, it is true, would have certainly followed her, but with a certain amount of uneasiness, and, possibly, discouragement. But Delange would have been quite capable of cancelling our contract and hurrying back to Paris to start a baccarat bank. The Baroness, however, had let us see just so much of Africa as was calculated to arouse our curiosity without satisfying it, to tire us without affecting our health, to inure us to fatigue without wearing us out. She introduced us to a little bit of a desert, which, so far from frightening us, whetted our appetites and gave us visions of horizons more vast, of plains more extended, of dangers more serious. As yet we only know a kind of toy Africa, harmless and without churlishness, spring-like and temperate, with its oases, its wells, its mountains, its miniature storms, all that makes life agreeable, variety, accident, everything to inspire a love of travel and incite to great discoveries.

" It is in this spirit that Périères, Delange, and I, full of confidence and utterly devoid of fear, more daring and audacious day by day, are undertaking the conquest of Africa. It may rebuff us, may weary us, may terrify us

with hardships, but we shall merely halt, rest a while, to-day at Berber, to-morrow at Khartoum, troubled only by the eager longing to go onward, to surmount fresh obstacles, to brave new dangers, and attain our settled goal.

"Do not think from all this, my dear fellow, that the town where we are is an Eden. This halt is pleasurable solely by comparison with the recent ones we have made in the desert. Berber consists simply of a long string of rather low-pitched houses, situate on the right bank of the Nile—a collection of shops and stalls, where European merchandize is exposed for sale at ruinous prices. The market, or bazaar, is very badly supplied, and it is with considerable difficulty that we succeeded in laying in the stock of provisions necessary for us during our journey as far as Khartoum. Fortunately for us, a French merchant, standing very high in these parts, and courteous to a degree, placed himself completely at our disposal, and smoothed away all our difficulties. Thanks to his kind offices, we have chartered a large vessel in which to ascend the Nile, and, acting on his good advice, after getting rid of our camels and their drivers, instead of parting also with our horses we have added some more to our stable. We shall in this way perform our journey, half by land, and half by water—on the Nile so long as it has any features of interest—on horseback, whenever our maps tell us that there is anything worth seeing in the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Our vessel is one of eighty tons, and we muster in all, masters, servants and crew, twenty-five souls. We certainly cannot complain, seeing that most of the boats on the Nile carry a hundred people, all told, without mentioning those which are laden with a cargo of two or three hundred slaves, packed together like herrings in a barrel, or perched like fowls on planks laid horizontally from one mast to the other.

"Happily we shall not meet on the river with any vessel employed in the slave trade. Baker is at this moment at Gondokoro with his river police. His is a noble task, but it will not have the results anticipated from it, so long as he does not exercise the same amount of surveillance over the land routes that he does on the Nile. The Governor of Kordofan, I am told, has in this present year allowed more than five hundred slave-dealers to pass through his territory. The majority of these *moudirs* are slave-dealers themselves, and so far from hindering the traffic, against which Baker is protesting so energetically, they encourage and protect it.

"In the fore-part of the vessel, a sort of

horse-box has been constructed for our horses, and in the after part, a partition separates us from the servants and crew, and furnishes us with a cabin, itself divided again into two compartments, one for Madame de Guéran and Miss Poles, and the other for us. These vessels, constructed for the navigation of the Upper Nile, are called *negghers*. The one we have chartered has been sent to us from Khartoum, and in all probability we shall retain it for the remainder of our journey along the river, that is, if we shape our course towards Gondokoro. It has only one mast, about twenty feet high, with an enormous yard and a lateen sail.

"We have set sail! The north wind, which prevails here throughout the greater part of the year, is in our favour, and we take advantage of its good-will to embark.

"Very soon we make out, on the left bank, El-Obisch, about two kilometres from the river, on the right bank, Kennour, and, some hours afterwards, our attention was called to the mouth of an important river, the Atbara, which rises on the confines of Abyssinia.

"The breadth of the Nile is imposing in the extreme; enormous forests stretch out into the distance on the one hand, and on the other may be seen, beyond the vast plains or savannahs which border on the stream, the desert of Bahiouda. At sunset this desert, lying on the western side, has the appearance of being enveloped in a vast conflagration, which

is reflected on the tops of the lofty trees on the eastern bank. Our vessel glides slowly on, and seems to be complacently regarding itself in the calm, clear water, whilst large flocks of goats and sheep, and herds of oxen and camels wend their way to quench their thirst in the stream.

" And now the scene changes, the trees give place to plants; clumps of calotropis, bushes of acacia, thickets of salvadora, plantations of durra. Turtle doves, white-throated swifts, widow-birds in their sombre dress of velvety black with yellow epaulettes, and Numidian cranes flit to and fro in this ocean of verdure.

" To-day we disembarked, after having ordered the captain to sail on and pick us up at Chendi. We wanted to ride a few miles by way of varying our pleasure.

" A gallop of two hours brought us to the ancient town of Meröe, remarkable for its handsome ruins and its pyramids. Meröe, some thousands of years ago was, as you no doubt know, the capital of a flourishing kingdom, renowned for its commerce, its sacred college and its monuments. In this country, despised in our day, a gigantic past springs up every now and then from the ground beneath your feet!

" At sunset we had to seek a halting-place, and this was offered to us by the Djaalin Arabs, who placed two very comfortable tents at our disposal. Just as, after a somewhat light supper, we were going to retire to our sleeping

apartments, a peculiar odour, for which none of us could account, suddenly reached our olfactory organs. Our interpreter, Ali, who had accompanied us, was despatched for information, and without any loss of time he edified us by a description of a very curious custom. The women of this country, in order to render themselves as pleasing as possible to their husbands, and to replace those charms of which time may have robbed them, have conceived the idea of attraction by means of perfumes, with which they impregnate themselves to such an extent that the odour appears natural to them. To arrive at this result, they dig a ditch, fill it with live charcoal, throw in fragrant plants and sweet-smelling wood, and, then, covered from head to foot in a huge sheet, they seat themselves over the ditch, and thus take an aromatic bath. Their husbands, deeply sensible of this delicate attention, forget in the power of their perfume, their weakness in the matter of beauty.

"'I suppose,' remarked Périères, 'that in this country a man would never say that his better half was pretty. He would dilate his nostrils, take a voluptuous sniff and exclaim, 'How nice my wife does smell!'

"This morning we went once more on board our vessel, which had kept moving all night, and awaited us at Chendi. This place recalls many an ancient glory; it was, they say, the famous island of Meröe of old, a powerful state of which even Thebes was a tributary. All

this splendour belongs to the past, but Chendi, anxious still to be talked about, has for a long time been a slave depôt.

"Our vessel now lands us on the other side of the stream, the left bank, at a place far less ancient, in which the houses are crowded together without any regularity or design, very much like ant hills, but thickly inhabited and often visited by slave and ivory merchants; it is called Matamma. Still under the charm of our last evening's excursion, we not only make an inspection of the town on horseback, but we venture as far as the edge of the famous desert of Bahiouda, of which, up to the present time, we had only seen the undulations from the deck of our vessel. This excursion led to an adventure, a very dramatic incident, which made a great impression upon me, and will, I feel sure, have a similar effect upon you."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"What induced us, I wonder, to venture thus into the open desert? Instead of galloping straight ahead it would have been more according to reason to follow the banks of the Nile and continue on our way towards Khartoum.

"Périères and Delange, recalling their sensations when in pursuit of the Nomads in the valley of El-Hejaz, doubtless longed for another taste of the desert. They set off at full speed, and we followed them without, or, rather, after reflection, to see if we in our turn could enjoy those sensations, whose praises they have so continually sung. Miss Poles, as usual, was actuated by her *amour propre;* she wished to appear and be admired as a horsewoman, and I am bound to confess that, if she did ride in a most break-neck and ungraceful fashion, she was at all events very firm in her saddle and intrepid to a degree.

"Very soon our guides begged us to moderate both our speed and our ardour. We obeyed, under protest, for we had lost all consciousness of time and distance, and we did not think we were as far from Matamma as they pretended we were. Omar, in self-defence, called on us to observe that we were on the direct route of

the caravans, and, in support of his assertion, he pointed out to us, in the distance, a long brown streak which stood out in strong contrast against the sun-illumined yellow of the sand and the clear, blue sky.

"'What is that?' asked Madame de Guéran. 'A town or a hillock?'

"'A cloud, more likely,' remarked Périères. 'It is not stationary, but moves in one direction.'

"'It is neither a hill nor a cloud,' replied the interpreter. 'That shadow on the horizon is produced by a long caravan coming from Kordofan, and making its way to Nubia across the desert of Bahiouda.'

"'And it is a caravan of slaves,' added the second interpreter.

"'How do you know that?' I asked.

"'Free men would not so uselessly brave the hardships of the desert; they would travel nearer to the Nile. Their keeping at such a distance from the stream shows that down south they have heard of General Baker, and they fear an attack and the consequent loss of their slaves.'

"'Suppose,' I exclaimed, with that want of reflection for which you always find so much fault with me, 'suppose we take Baker's place with these poor wretches?'

"'That would be a senseless proceeding,' said Delange. 'We have not come to Africa to fight at every turn, and we five can scarcely set ourselves up to reform the morals of the country.'

"'The Doctor is quite right,' said Madame

de Guéran. 'We are, I fear, destined to witness some sad scenes. We must, alas! stand by, and exercise sufficient self-control to abstain from all interference which may seem to us futile and involving too great risk.'

"'And I,' said Miss Poles, 'will add, if you will allow me, that it is not on the Nile, as my fellow countryman, Baker, is doing, nor in the desert, as you propose to do, that the struggle should be made against the slave trade. The blow must be struck at the source—in Turkey, in Asia, Arabia, Persia, and certain places in Egypt. It is the insatiable luxury of these countries which must be put down. If the Sultans, their ministers, their wives, the petty governors of provinces, however small, and every man of more than ordinary wealth, did not make a point of possessing as many slaves as possible, if two thousand wretches in their pay did not continually penetrate into the interior of Africa for the sole purpose of collecting this article of luxury, which is a part of their ambition, the slave trade would have no *raison d'être*, and civilization might permeate throughout these lands. When I was with poor Alexina Tinne, I studied this question thoroughly, and I assure you that I am not mistaken.'

"Conversing thus, we drew near to the caravan, and saw a long line of beings, who, according to the calculations of our interpreters, must have mustered between two and three hundred.

"'I am more than ever convinced,' said Ali, 'that this is a caravan of slaves.'

"On our asking the reason of his conviction, he replied—

"'I do not see any camels; the slaves take the place of beasts of burden.'

"'Ah!' I exclaimed, 'I want to be a closer witness of this, and since, Baroness, you say that we must harden our hearts, let us take advantage of this opportunity.'

"I put spurs to my horse, and the whole cavalcade followed me, quite as much to obviate my being left to myself as from motives of curiosity. Once on the move, there was no necessity for a halt; we were not riding haphazard, but we knew where we were going and what was the object of this excursion into the desert.

"After an hour's ride, we came up with the caravan, or, to speak more correctly, we reached a spot where it was bound to pass.

"It advanced slowly, step by step, appearing to wind along like a huge serpent tracing its sinuous course in the sand. At last it defiled in front of us.

"The leader marched at the head, enveloped in a large bûrnus, silently, deliberately, carrying his carbine on his shoulder. Five or six Arabs, clothed and armed like their chief, kept close on his heels, and, every now and then, turned round to take a look at the immense human herd which followed them.

"As they passed us they saluted us courte-

ously, but without stopping or showing the slightest mistrust of us. Behind them the whole caravan wound along, composed of from two hundred and fifty to three hundred persons, marching one behind the other. A long cord, beginning and ending with the column, divided it into two parts, and to this rope each captive was fastened by means of a small iron chain attached to the left arm. Thus chained, and bound to each other, men, women and children appeared to form one and the same body, obeying the same impulse, and having but one life.

"There was a gap of about sixty centimetres between each group, so that the whole of this living cluster extended over a hundred metres. A rear-guard of three or four armed men closed the column, whose flanks were watched by ten more Arabs, five on each side.

"All the slaves, half-naked, had heavy loads on their heads, some laden with durra and rice, others with large leathern bottles filled with water, and a few, whom their masters evidently considered as being too anxious for freedom and thereby liable to punishment, had still heavier loads, although their necks were firmly fixed in a species of large yoke which prevented them even from turning their heads.

"If their masters had passed us in a careless fashion, the slaves, on the contrary, cast on us timid and despairing glances. It was a heart-rending sight, I can tell you, and despite all our efforts to be calm, we could with difficulty restrain our emotion. Périères tugged at his long

moustache, Delange stroked his beard, Miss Poles wiped her spectacles, and tears coursed down the cheeks of Madame de Guéran. Nevertheless, we remained motionless and silent. In rear of the column walked the women, the sick and the children, with their left wrists enchained, and loads on their heads. One woman of about twenty, with attenuated frame, haggard face and weary look, attracted our attention. She seemed to bend beneath her burden, which was weighing her down; her limbs tottered, her bosom heaved, and large, scalding tears welled from out her eyes.

"She did not make any effort to arouse our sympathy; on the contrary, she appeared to wish to conceal her weakness, her misery and her degradation; she turned her head as she raised it, and made futile efforts to walk upright. But, when a few paces from us, her strength failed her, her limbs gave way, and she sank to the earth. Her companions did not notice it; the impetus was there, and the fall of one person could not influence the onward march of two hundred others. Fastened by the wrist to her companions, she was dragged along with them, or, rather, by them, and was carried on by the human stream.

"We looked on, still silent and without stirring, but more excited than ever, and trembling in every limb.

"Suddenly, one of the overseers of the caravan caught sight of this slave, whose load had fallen to the ground, and who, instead of

walking like the rest, half-fainting, half-dying, allowed herself to be borne onward by the crowd. He went up to her, spoke to her harshly, and, as she did not reply, he uplifted a leathern strap, and struck her.

"At that moment, my dear fellow, we one and all experienced a species of electric shock; a shudder went through our frames, to our silence succeeded shouts of indignation, and from being motionless as statues we became alert with fury. You shall soon know how."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"Obeying one common idea, and swayed by one common impulse, we rushed to the rescue of the unfortunate slave. In an instant the man who had struck her was on the ground and disarmed by Delange, or Périères, or myself, or, possibly, by Miss Poles, for I cannot tell you exactly what passed. But the column still moved on, and the woman was dragged along with it. We saw at once that we must not confine ourselves to avenging the poor creature —we must aid her and save her.

"I forced the man to follow me to where she was, and release her from her chains. My revolver had an eloquence of its own, the woman was set free, and Madame de Guéran and the Doctor having dismounted, were soon paying her every possible attention.

"This little scene had not, of course, escaped the notice of the men who composed the escort, nor of the leader at their head. The calm indifference which they had showed towards us was all assumed, for they certainly watched us out of the corners of their eyes and took account of our slightest movement. But the leader of the caravan, an old Portuguese trader

turned Mussulman (one of the interpreters had recognized him) thought it more prudent, for commercial reasons, to appear not to see what was going on. What did one half dead slave matter to him? A few miles more, and she would be incapable of walking, and he would be compelled then to leave her to her fate in the desert.

"Consequently, not only did he make no attempt to bear down upon us with his men, but he increased the speed of the column, so as to escape as soon as possible from the small band of Franks. (That is the name given by Mussulmen to all Europeans indiscriminately.)

"But our first success had emboldened us; as far as I was concerned, I was fairly launched, and, in this respect, I bear some resemblance to Miss Poles; when once I am launched, or have started, whichever you like, there is no stopping me. I was, at the same time, struck by one of those ideas which I will modestly describe as sublime. I imparted it to my friends, and the very people who, half-an-hour previously, had overwhelmed me with incontrovertible arguments to prove that we ought not to meddle with the slave trade, but that the dealers in human flesh should be allowed to ply their nefarious traffic unmolested—these very people now adopted my idea enthusiastically, and helped me to put it in force.

"Périères, Delange, and I went off at full speed without any warning whatever, leaving the two interpreters near the ladies as a pro-

tection. We three, each taking a separate course, reached the caravan at three different points, and so soon as we could get hold of the long rope to which the slaves were bound, we cut it through with our knives in several places.

"The line had no longer one body and one life, its unity, in which consisted the safety of the escort, had disappeared, the disunited fragments only could be seen of the huge serpent which, a few seconds before, had been tortuously gliding along the sand.

"By this time, as you may well imagine, the chief and his men abandoned their inactivity and thought it was high time for them to interfere, so, after having ordered the slaves to halt, they made straight for us, and, on our side, we awaited them without flinching.

"The party which advanced against us was composed of about ten, the remainder of the escort remaining with the slaves to frustrate any attempt to escape.

"'Why do you attack us?' exclaimed their leader, in a rage, 'we have not done you any harm.'

"Périères was on the point of replying, but I begged him to allow me to speak, and advancing towards the chief, I said—

"'I am carrying out the orders intrusted to me.'

"'What orders? Who are you?' asked the trader.

"'We are officers and friends of General Baker,' I replied with the utmost assurance,

'and we have been delegated by him to put a stop to the slave-trade.'

"'You ! it is not true—you are not in uniform.'

"I might have expected this remark, for in these parts great *prestige* attaches to any uniform, and everybody representing any authority whatever ought either to be decked with lace, or ornaments, or a forage cap, or a fez, or, better still, a sword, which is the insignia of command. But I was not to be frightened.

"'Our uniforms are at Matamma,' I replied, 'we had simply come out for a ride on the sand, without dreaming that you would have the audacity to show yourselves. And in proof of what I say, here is my commission,' and so saying, I took out of my pocket the letter of the Governor of Souakim.

"I had read somewhere, either in Schweinfurth's or Barth's works, that in Africa letters either sealed or stamped have a wonderful effect on the people, an effect which is heightened in proportion to their inability to understand them. So I opened my letter, and instead of reading the contents, I recited from memory, with certain additional and personal details, the latest firman of the Khedive, which I had seen posted up in Cairo.

"'We, Ismael, Khedive of Egypt, considering the savage condition of the tribes who inhabit the Nile Basin, considering that humanity imposes on all the duty of putting down the slave hunters who occupy those countries in

great numbers—We have decreed and hereby do decree as follows—An expedition is organized for the suppression of the slave trade, and the introduction of a system of regular commerce.

"'The Command-in-Chief of this expedition is entrusted to Sir Samuel White Baker, for four years, commencing from the 4th April, 1869.

"'And we invest him, and all his officers, with the most absolute power, even that of death, over all slave-traders or slave-merchants who may resist this authority.'

"My reading ended, or, if you prefer it, my lesson recited, I calmly re-folded the letter of the Governor of Souakim, converted under my hand into a firman from the Khedive, put it in my pocket, and looked up to enjoy the effect I hoped I had produced on the bystanders.

"Périères and Delange smiled behind their moustaches, the men of the escort were dumbfounded, but their rascally leader, in his character as a wily old Portuguese, did not appear in the least moved by my reading, either because he did not care two straws for the official document, or because he considered that we were not in sufficient strength to enforce it.

"After a glance around him to assure himself that the slaves were not making any attempt at escape, and after having reckoned up his escort, he complacently stroked his scanty beard and, looking at me with blinking eyes, he said—

"'These slaves are my property. I bought

them in Darfour and Kordofan. The Khedive has no right to take them from me, and I will not give them up!'

"'Then,' I replied, without hesitation, 'we shall be obliged to arrest you.'

"'Take care,' said he, falling back a pace or two, 'I shall defend myself.'

"'As you please! But you are acting in disobedience of the orders of the Khedive, and I have a right to put you to death—don't forget that.'

"I was determined, in order to intimidate the escort, to lay hands on their leader, when, suddenly, loud shouts were heard, followed immediately by a series of shots. On turning our eyes in the direction of the caravan, we understood at once what had happened.

"I have already told you that amongst the slaves, there were several whose necks were fastened in a sort of collar or yoke. These were the intractable ones, the incorrigibles, as they say on the hulks, who railed against their fate, and were on the look-out for an opportunity of escape. They were, moreover, robust and stalwart men who would command a good price, but would be dangerous in case of revolt. These men, negroes mostly from Darfour, had perceived that we wished to rescue them. At first they awaited patiently the result of our interview, and then, very likely, they whispered to each other that, as we were not numerous, they had better help themselves and take advantage of such liberty as we had already given them.

They had gradually gathered together in one group of about thirty, and by signs, and by words passed from mouth to mouth, they had hit upon a plan of escape.

"The moment they saw me advance towards the leader, a proceeding which rather flurried his escort, they got rid of their loads, and took to flight with marvellous agility. Though their necks and wrists were fettered, their legs were perfectly free, and the negroes have a great reputation as fast runners.

"But the escort had opened fire on the runaways, one of them was hit in the thigh, and already their progress was retarded.

"'Shall we let these people be massacred?' I exclaimed, as I heard the chief order the escort to reload.

"'No,' shouted my friends, 'let us go to their rescue.'

"Périères, Delange, and I galloped off, after having given strict injunctions to the two interpreters to watch over the safety of Madame de Guéran and Miss Poles, who were still on their knees by the side of the slave, in whom they had by this time succeeded in restoring animation.

"We very soon came up with the fugitives, who stopped when they saw who we were, and made us understand that, if we wished to save them, the first thing to do was to remove the yokes which kept their necks fixed in one position, and the chains which fastened them to one another.

"The operation was by no means easy, but Périères and I set to work at once, whilst Delange attended to the wound of the negro who had been hit by a bullet and was bleeding copiously.

"I had just released one of the slaves from both his yoke and chains, when Périères, astonished at not hearing any more firing, looked up towards the place where we had left the escort, and uttered an exclamation of alarm.

"The chief and his men, instead of keeping up a continuous fire on the negroes, and so destroying the human live-stock from which they hoped to net so goodly a haul, turned their attention to the spot where we had left our two companions and the couple of interpreters. Omar and Ali, fearing to draw the fire of the escort upon the two ladies confided to their protection, did not defend themselves, and, as they were knocked down at once, Madame de Guéran was left at the mercy of these wretches.

"You may well imagine, my dear fellow, that it was no question of bursting bonds or binding up wounds—all we had to do was to rush to the rescue of her whom our imprudence and fool-hardiness were exposing to such terrible danger.

"The escort, as soon as we were seen advancing, opened fire upon us. From out ten muzzles sped the messengers of death, and Périères and Delange rolled over at my feet.

CHAPTER XL.

"When I saw my two friends fall I cast an anxious glance in the direction of Madame de Guéran and Miss Poles, but I saw at once that they were in no immediate danger, the escort having left them for a moment, in order to unite all their force against us and put an end to us as quickly as possible. Reassured on that point, I dismounted to assist my friends. They, however, were already struggling to rise, and I found to my great joy that they were not hurt. Their horses had been hit, one in the head and the other in the chest, and had fallen, dragging their riders down with them into she sand.

"But just as Delange and Périères were getting on their legs I put my two hands on their shoulders and held them down.

"'What are you doing?' asked Périères.

"'Hush!' I said, in a whisper as I knelt beside them, 'I am saving you, and re-establishing the balance of the struggle. These wretches have us within range of their guns, as the two poor horses fully prove, but they are themselves out of pistol-shot. Let them believe that we are wounded; they will come on then to put an end to us, and we can at all events defend ourselves.'

"'But Madame de Guéran—' murmured Périères.

"'At this moment,' replied I, 'she does not run the slightest risk, and if she should be again menaced we shall know what to do with our lives.'

"Anybody seeing me lying alongside my friends would have believed that I had been wounded by the same volley which had brought them down. The two horses, one of which was dead and the other in his last agony, served as a rampart for us, and enabled us to follow all the movements of the enemy.

"They advanced towards us, exulting in, as they fondly believed, their complete success, but as soon as they were within range of our pistols we, without raising our bodies, let fly.

"Three men fell, and the remainder recoiled, but the old chief rallied the latter, pointing out to them that they were still numerically stronger, and they advanced once more.

"We were just going to fire again when we heard loud shouts on our right.

"The negroes whom we had set free were running towards us. Do not, my dear fellow, allow yourself to be deluded into the idea that, actuated by gratitude, they were coming to our aid. If, perchance, there were one or two of them who were acted upon by such a sentiment, the remainder thought, first of all, of revenge. For a long time they had submitted with resignation to a thousand and one tortures and indignities, for were they not the weaker? But,

thanks to the man whose fetters we had struck off, the others now forced themselves free. They called the roll, found that they had now become the stronger party, armed themselves with their yokes, which, in their hands, were converted into formidable clubs, and, shouting their war-cry, and yelling like wild beasts, they rushed on the foe.

"The old chief saw the danger that threatened him, and attempted to break ground towards the left. He advanced a few paces in that direction, but was obliged to fall back, for the whole of his slaves had crowded together in one impenetrable mass. Several amongst them had succeeded in bursting their bonds, and incited by the cries and gesticulations of the women, appeared anxious to take part in the battle. The rebellion was a terrible one on this side, too. There were so many old scores to wipe off, and the victims had for so long a time craved to play the part of executioners!

"In this way the chief and his escort saw themselves confronted by us, and they dared not advance within range of our revolvers. The strongest and most dangerous of their slaves, the only ones whom they had up to this time feared, held them in check on the right, and, on the left, an enormous crowd, hostile and already threatening danger, barred every avenue of escape.

"Their only plan, therefore, was to fall back to their rear and so endeavour to get away, and that was the course they adopted. But here

they were stopped by the two interpreters, who, by this time, were on their feet again, by Miss Poles, armed with a pistol, which she seemed bent on using, and by Madame de Guéran, who, calm and determined, surveyed the field of battle, like a regular commander-in-chief.

"This last was our weakest point, I admit, and the escort could have easily broken down all opposition from that quarter, but instead of acting at once, they made the mistake of hesitating, and of so allowing the two wings to join hands. They were, in consequence, very soon hemmed in on all sides by the terrible circle of enemies.

"And now our beloved Sultana thought it high time to interfere, and she directed the interpreters to step to the front and inform the chief that she would answer for his life and those of his men, if they all would lay down their arms at once, but if, on the contrary, they fired a single shot, she would leave them to the mercy of their revolted slaves.

"The chief looked long and anxiously around him, and, after a careful survey of his position, he threw his gun down on the sand, with a gesture of despair, an example which was followed by his men.

"Périères, Delange, and I, as you may well imagine, lost no time in joining Madame de Guéran and Miss Poles. But we were soon brought sadly down to earth again, and had to ask ourselves if it was wise to act on every good impulse, if sometimes it was not necessary

to stifle our generous feelings, and if it was not dangerous to let loose the passions of the people of Africa.

"For as long as our black friends of Darfour and Kordofan saw their whilom masters fighting or defending themselves, they contented themselves with threats and a cautious advance. But as soon as they beheld them, on the contrary, disarmed and capitulating, they rushed on them, eager for their prey. At one and the same time the whole caravan—the two hundred and odd slaves, of every age and sex, the weak and the strong, the hale and the sick, rushed forward brandishing their yet chain-bound wrists, and giving tongue like a pack of hounds at the death.

"Ought we to allow these fifteen men to be massacred under our very eyes? We had attacked them in the first instance; they had not provoked us in any way, and had only defended themselves. Three of them were already wounded, and not one of us had been hit. They were, it is true, wretched slave-drivers, gaol-birds, renegades, degraded traffickers in human flesh; but Madame de Guéran had promised, in our name, that if they laid down their arms their lives should be spared. And were these negroes, of whom we had constituted ourselves the champions, any better than their masters? A short time ago they were unhappy, and oppressed, and we were moved with compassion for them; but now that they were restored to liberty, they seemed so

bent on abusing it that they no longer inspired us with much sympathy. In short, we were tempted to ask ourselves whether we had any right to sacrifice the lives of fifteen persons for the sake of resisting the slave trade and rescuing a few men from bondage.

"These reflections (we imparted them to each other later on, in our moments of confidence) occurred to us all simultaneously, but this was no time for bothering our heads with the solution of a philosophical problem. We had acted on impulse, and on impulse we must rely for escape, by deeds and not arguments, from the sad position in which we were placed.

"Each of us, without consulting his neighbour, and yielding to the thoughts which I have endeavoured to explain to you, drew nearer to the captured escort for the purpose of protecting them.

"The slaves continued to shout and threaten, and Périères then hit upon the plan of directing the interpreter, Ali, who knew all the dialects current in Darfour and Kordofan, to step forward, restore order and silence, and make them understand that he wished to speak to them in our name.

"The interpreter obeyed, and the negroes ceased their clamour sooner than we anticipated. They said to themselves, no doubt, that the whites were about to propose the infliction of some novel torture on their enemies, and their condemnation to some punishment unknown to them, but in common use amongst the Franks.

From this impression they drew a premature pleasure, opened their eyes and lent their ears. However, when Ali set himself to repeat an old-fashioned discourse, prompted by Miss Poles, of which the duties one owes to one's neighbour, humanity, and religion form the staple commodity, the slaves, after having given evident signs of indifference, commenced to manifest a spirit of discontent, and we had evidently fallen in their esteem.

"I then advanced with the second interpreter, and, following out my little idea, I spoke of General Baker, the liberator of the blacks. 'He has sent us,' I exclaimed, 'to the rescue of all slave caravans, but with a positive order, after freeing the captives, to bring their masters to him for punishment.'

"This speech, and I say it with pride, produced more effect than its predecessor, but I must also modestly confess that it was very far from bringing conviction home to my audience. These people, without exception, were blind to every feeling except that the pleasure of revenge was being withheld from them, and that the victors in the fray, instead of themselves killing their prisoners, wished to relegate that duty to a third person, and give him all the enjoyment. Their shouts recommenced, and the circle contracted itself more and more.

"To Madame de Guéran alone belongs the credit of having caught the public ear and touched the right chord. She ordered one of the interpreters to simply tell the blacks that

they would be acting unfairly if they deprived the white people of prisoners whom they hoped to sell in their own country for a good round sum. This argument, my dear fellow, like all arguments suited to the particular audience to which they are addressed, produced an instantaneous effect. The negroes looked at each other, wagged their heads, and seemed to say—'they are right.' At war from their infancy, one tribe against another, for the sole purpose of taking as many prisoners as possible and selling them to the slave-dealers, would they not be very likely to think it natural that we should share their instincts and their tastes?

"Madame de Guéran had summed up the situation admirably. She saved the escort, and, perhaps, saved us also, for we were determined to defend these men, even at the risk of our own lives.

"The blacks stepped back a few paces to consult, and then, suddenly, returned towards us shouting as loudly as ever."

CHAPTER XLI.

"We were soon enlightened as to the meaning of the uproar.

"The negroes were gifted with inexorable logic. According to them, since we wished to carry off our prisoners into bondage, we ought to take the same precautions with them that they had with their slaves. As their own wrists had been hung with chains, and their necks forced under the yoke, we ought to put the same measures in force, and to this end they very kindly handed over to us the necessary articles.

"It would have been positively unfair to deprive these good folk of their little enjoyment, and, as regards the escort, seeing that they had had every sort of reason to believe that they were doomed to be massacred, they might very well think themselves lucky in getting off with a simple application of the *lex talionis*. Consequently, we did not see any use in protesting against this decidedly African idea, and we let our new friends fetter their prisoners to their heart's content.

"At such moments as these, my dear fellow, men who have any pretensions to common sense will go with the stream, yield to circumstances, and give up their sentimental tendencies. And,

moreover, I will not attempt to conceal from you that I felt a thrill of enjoyment at the prospect of seeing those worthy traders undergoing for several hours the identical treatment which for so many years they had been inflicting upon the tribes in these regions. They made the most ludicrous efforts to get their heads out of the yokes and to free their shoulders from the heavy loads with which their former slaves were weighing them down.

"I rejoiced also, you may be sure, over the moral torture they were undergoing. Please understand that I do not by this mean that they had any sense of humiliation—they were incapable of any such feeling; I allude to the injury done to their commercial interests. Just think for a moment—after having undertaken, and almost accomplished, so hazardous a journey, after having gone through such toilsome exertions to provide slaves for the markets of southern Africa—after all this, to see the fruits of their labour gone at one fell swoop! To have to surrender a certain profit, as they thought, and be at all the expense of their first purchase, besides the cost of provisions, cords, chains and yokes! The chains and the yokes, it is true, had been generously restored, and they could take them with them on their necks, but the bags of rice and durra, of which they had provided a supply sufficient to meet their wants across the deserts of Bahiouda and Nubia, became the property of the negroes. These inconsiderate people were even indiscreet enough

to lay violent hands on the private supplies of the chief and his escort, dried meat, dates, coffee, tobacco, which up to now they had been compelled to carry on their heads without the power of touching them.

"This wholesale robbery of eatables, however, created a diversion; for the negroes, after having securely rivetted their prisoners and handed them over to us, gave themselves up to the enjoyment of such a meal as they had not made for a long time. We took advantage of the liberty thus accorded to us, and commenced our preparations for departure.

"At least five leagues separated us from Matamma, and some amongst us would be obliged to accomplish the journey on foot. Périères and Delange, who had been dismounted in the fray, might have made use of the horses allotted to our interpreters; but they preferred handing them over to our wounded enemies, on whom the Doctor had operated, to the great astonishment of the negroes. In fact, when the latter saw Delange open his instrument case and take out the forceps to extract the bullets, they thought we had returned to a better frame of mind, and were arranging the preliminaries of an execution. They speedily recognized that we have a peculiar way of our own as regards the infliction of torture, by which health is restored to the victim, and he is set on his feet, and it is just possible that this lesson of practical morality was not thrown away on these overgrown children, cruel, as all

children are, by instinct and through ignorance.

"Madame de Guéran was anxious to take with her the female slave, the primary cause of all the trouble, whom she had already restored to consciousness, and hoped, by care and attention, to save altogether. It would, moreover, have been downright inhumanity to have left the unhappy woman with her companions, for she could not have followed them throughout the long journey necessary in order to regain their own country, and she would have died of hunger and sickness in the midst of the desert. Our two Arab intepreters improvised a sort of litter, on which they laid her, themselves undertaking the task of carrying her.

"We started off, and I am bound to admit that the majority of the negroes left off feasting to give us a few parting cheers. Several of them, indeed, escorted us for a considerable time, yelling frantically all the way; but I am constrained to record also that if they did come near us and kiss our hands and our garments, they at the same time indulged our prisoners with a pretty liberal allowance of the leathern strap they knew so well. The old chief, in spite of all our efforts, was the recipient of most of their attentions, and they did their best to pay him back in one hour all they had received from him in two months.

"What would become of all these people, so unexpectedly restored by us to liberty? Our interpreters told us that they had advised many

of them to go to Khartoum, where we might meet them again and take them into our employ, if, as was very probable, we should form there a large caravan for our explorations southwards.

"After getting well away from them we lost no time in taking the chains and yokes off our prisoners, and we, in so doing, merely told them that, unless they felt a particular vocation in connection with pistol bullets, they had better keep quiet.

"Why all these precautions? you will say. Had we made up our minds to reduce these men to slavery? No, certainly not; they had disgusted us so much that their society was unbearable. But their restoration to liberty might, possibly, lead to their again taking a fancy to their former slaves, and, should they fall on the latter in the midst of their feasting and revelry, a number, if not all, would speedily be recaptured. Then it must be borne in mind that these men looked upon us as robbers and highwaymen, who had attacked a perfectly legitimate caravan, and had plundered respectable traders.

"They never gave a thought to what we had done for them. They said, and so far they were right, that we should never have had to protect them if, instead of attacking them, we had allowed them to pursue the even tenour of their way.

"And do not imagine, my dear Pommerelle, that all the world will approve of our conduct. There are, even in Europe, plenty of persons

inclined to laud the sweets of slavery and to maintain that the slave-traders confer a great boon on the blacks in rescuing them from their own wretched country and landing them in Turkey, where they certainly enjoy a greater amount of ease and comfort than they can do at home.

"Without inflicting any lengthy arguments on you, I will commence by saying that the regions inhabited by the negroes are wretched, principally because the interest of the slave-dealers lies in perpetually fomenting in them civil war. I will add that out of every three hundred slaves dragged from their homes, scarcely one-third reach the, comparatively speaking, civilized country alluded to, and that the remainder are left to rot in the desert, victims of fatigue, exhaustion, and disease.

"Looking at the question from an elevated point of view, I will sum up in these words—Slavery is a disgrace, is contrary to all the laws of morality, and ought to be opposed in every possible way and destroyed. There you have my sentiments, frankly and concisely expressed, and they are the more worthy of respect, seeing that if I fall back upon my ancestors I find in my maternal great-uncle, the Count de Chabanne, one who was, before the Revolution, the largest slave-holder in St. Domingo. My memory also recalls the fact that I was born in a French colony, Guadaloupe, where slavery was in full force, and that the emancipation, proclaimed by Lamartine, in

1848, and decreed by the Provisional Government, deprived me of the greater portion of my revenues, a circumstance which I cannot regret.

"Without re-entering Matamma, we made direct for the Nile, where we found our vessel, and towards ten o'clock at night we set our prisoners down gently on the bank, after having distributed some eatables amongst them, so that they should have nothing wherewith to reproach us. I could not feel any uneasiness as to the fate of these men; they would not be long before they resumed their usual calling, about which Omar and Ali had, during the return journey, given us some curious information. Any penniless adventurer, by the mere mention of his intention to form a slave-catching expedition, can easily borrow in Egypt the funds necessary for his enterprise. He then engages a number of villains, renegades of all religions, runaway criminals, escaped convicts, blackguards of every hue, the scum of every country, and with this retinue he sails up the Nile as far as Gondokoro; there he disembarks, and proceeds into the interior until he arrives at some negro village. Here he displays his glass beads, necklaces, bracelets, and all the countless trifles with which he has provided himself to excite the cupidity of the negroes. The latter hasten to make their purchases, and offer in payment their current coin. 'No,' say the traders, 'we want slaves in exchange for our wares.' The buyers have none to give, but that difficulty is

soon overcome. The chief of the tribe proposes a razzia into the neighbouring district, and, as this is the sole object the traders have in view, the offer is accepted. The village selected for attack is surrounded and set on fire, the herds of cattle are taken possession of, and violent hands are laid on all the women, children, and such men as have not fallen in the fight.

"Then comes the dividing of the spoil; the glass beads, &c., are generously handed over to the negroes, whilst the traders keep the slaves for their own share, subsequently either selling them to other adventurers, who take them to the south-east, to the great slave-market of Zanzibar, or leading them, at their own risk and peril, further north to the countries where Islamism and slavery prevail.

"Do not ask me for anything more now, my dear fellow, for after so eventful a day I am in a hurry to find a quiet nook on board our vessel, wherein, with a quiet conscience, I may obtain a well-earned repose."

CHAPTER XLII.

"When I awoke my eyes were greeted by the most charming, peaceful scene it has ever fallen to my lot to witness.

"The Nile, for a considerable distance, is interspersed with a number of islets (called in these parts the ninety-nine islands) which may be very easily mistaken for clumps of verdure and flowers. On either bank innumerable aquatic plants and tropical creepers float in the stream, or, springing up from the shore, seek shelter under the tamarinds, soonts, and palms. The rounded roofs of the riverside villages recall to our minds the summer-houses of an English garden.

"To this pleasing tableau succeeds very quickly a most picturesque sight. We now began to feel the influence of the sixth cataract. The Nile, instead of flowing in majestic breadth, becomes suddenly contracted, and is converted into a torrent, walled on either side by cliffs, and carrying us in imagination to the passes in the Pyrenees. The peak of Raouïan and the valley-straits of Sablouk complete the illusion.

"We land for the purpose of visiting the little village of Dasrurab and the green plain surrounding it. In the middle of this plain I notice a number of tripod-shaped tressels, the object

of which it is beyond me to describe. Ali undertakes to enlighten me. It appears that just about harvest time flocks of birds fly from all parts of Nubia to collect the grain, in anticipation of the owner thereof. The latter have hit upon no better idea for the protection of their property than to place at intervals these tressels or stands, on each of which a slave has to squat during the whole of the day, thus taking the place of those dressed-up figures with which we in France frighten away the birds. The wretched creatures condemned, under a scorching sun, to play the part of living scare-crows, are as a rule the aged of both sexes, who, incapable from infirmity of gaining a livelihood in any other way, thus terribly earn the morsel of bread which their master condescends to throw to them. Most assuredly, my dear Pommerelle, the more I reflect, the less I regret, if indeed I ever regretted it, my yesterday's expedition against the slave-traders. Don't let anybody talk to me again of the ease and comfort enjoyed by the Eastern slave. As long as they are ornamental they are taken the greatest care of, they are decked out and polished till they positively shine, but as soon as age deteriorates them, they may rot on any dung-hill.

"We are approaching Khartoum, and the villages on the right bank become more numerous. The patches of verdure have disappeared, and the Nile has lost its picturesque character. On the right nothing can be seen but sandy wastes, apparently skirting the district of

Akaba, an extensive tract of uncultivated country merging into the desert of Bahiouda.

"Passing by Kerrieri, we arrive at last at Khartoum, a town replete with bustle and movement, in the full tide of Turkish and African civilization, crowded with the countless vessels and boats of all sorts and sizes, which, at this time of the year, throng the port. In a few days, towards the middle of December, the navigation of the White Nile will become easy, and all the merchants of the country are hard at work preparing their cargoes of European commodities for the south—silk, cotton, and woollen goods, muslins, powder, sugar, spices, coffee, and arrack—in exchange for the produce of equatorial countries, such as gum, gold dust, ostrich feathers, rhinoceros horns, hippopotamus and elephant's tusks, and last but not least, a goodly number of slaves, whom, in spite of the Government edicts, they know how to hide in some den and sell to a pacha or a bey, whose position places him out of the reach of the law. We must admit this fundamental principle—in Eastern countries nothing changes, old manners and customs are always more powerful than laws and firmans. The Turk is, so to speak, steeped in the past; he sometimes is subject to superficial reform, but he soon returns to his former errors, and stagnates afresh in his ancient traditions.

"I promised to take you as far as Khartoum, and I have kept my promise. I will not, however, limit you to your pound of flesh, but,

before taking leave of you, perhaps, for some time, I will give you a few concise notes about this town, curious in more ways than one. These notes are indispensable to you, if you really take any interest in our journey and wish to follow our onward course. A little patience, and Périères and Delange will take you for a walk through this wonderful place, and will unfold to you its secrets; for, so I am told, there is a truly marvellous freedom of morals in Khartoum, and in it the scent of European corruption mingles with the acrid stench of savage life.

"Starting into existence in 1823, the town has developed rapidly, and now can certainly boast more than 50,000 inhabitants, divided into several classes. The first class is composed of, at the most, fifty Europeans, whose numbers are annually decreased by one-third owing to the unhealthy climate, but are regularly recruited from Cairo by fresh arrivals eager for rapid fortunes. The principal business is almost entirely confined to ten of these Europeans, amongst whom there are some honourable men. The ivory trade is, in fact, distinct from the slave trade, and it is a mistake, very generally made, to suppose that the first is merely a cloak to the other. All these large men of business have agencies in the equatorial provinces where elephants' tusks are bartered for home produce. Unfortunately, these agencies, lawful in themselves, have become rendezvous for the slave hunters, and serve as starting points for their

expeditions into the unexplored regions, thus affording additional facilities for the prosecution of their infamous trade. Hence the confusion which exists in the minds of most men on this subject.

"The remaining classes of the population of Khartoum comprise a number of Turks, still more Arab traders from Upper Egypt, El-Hejaz, and the western shores of the Red Sea, and a crowd of *fakis*, a race of quacks who combine the occupation of schoolmaster with that of a dealer in fetiches or charms. The greater part of them pursue another calling, and occupy themselves in a shameless trade, which, to speak very mildly, does not conduce to the morality of Khartoum.

"Finally, the most numerous class, in itself as large as all the others put together, is composed of a mixture of negroes, soldiers, and sailors, whom every leader of a White River expedition is compelled to enlist into his service, of petty itinerant dealers, Almehs licensed or otherwise, slaves of all nationalities, and a garrison of about four thousand men, recruited from the Nubians or Bashi-Bazouks. The rapid rise of the town is to be attributed to its admirable position from a commercial point of view. Khartoum is, in fact, situated at the junction of the Bahr-el-Abiad, or White River, and the Bahr-el-Azrek, or Blue River, which, when united, form the Nile, properly so called. To the south of Khartoum, and ascending towards the Equator, the people of the country rarely

make use of the word Nile. They say the White River when they wish to describe the stream which flows directly from the south, and the Blue River when they allude to the other stream which passes Sennaar and rises in Abyssinia.

"The White Nile, or River, is undoubtedly the more important of these two streams, and its importance is so great that it very often gives its name to the sister stream. It is itself formed by the confluence, at about 8° latitude N, of two other affluents; the Bahr-el-Djebel, more commonly called the Sobat, and the Bahr-el-Gazal, or Gazelle River, which flows eastwards. These various water routes take the vessels either to Gondokoro, the extreme navigable point, and where most voyages of discovery have ended, or to the ivory country, amongst the Nuehr, Djours, and Dinka tribes, or in the direction of the great lakes.

"But to come back to Khartoum, of which you will now have some idea both as regards its population and its geographical position. A few lines will suffice to show you over its streets, its gardens, and its monuments. The only public buildings to be met with are Government House, called the Divan, the prison, some Mosques, without anything remarkable about them, a hospital, tolerably well managed, thanks to the assistance rendered by European doctors, a powder manufactory, and a few barracks. But Khartoum is worthy of mention for the truly exceptional beauty of its gardens,

which extend for some miles along the left bank of the Blue River. The plants, half a century old, afford the most delicious shade, and ought to have a beneficial effect on the sanitary condition of the town. They have, however, no such effect, owing to the place having been built originally in the midst of a pestilential marsh, and to render it healthy it must be pulled down altogether—a measure far too radical for this country.

"And now, my dear fellow, as soon as I have told you about the markets, you will know Khartoum as well as I do. I could only judge of them by the people who crossed each other's path in them, in every sense of the phrase, and whose complexions, of every hue, indicated their varied origin. All the races who inhabit the world pass by, one after the other; from the white-skinned Greek to the ebony Negro, the intermediate stages being the dark brown Arab, the copper coloured Abyssinian, certain tribes whose colour verges on the blue (*asrak*), others on green (*ahkdar*), and others still partaking of red (*ahmar*), a sort of human rainbow in fact.

"My task is ended, my dear Pommerelle, and you will have no more descriptions from me. I yield my pen to other hands."

CHAPTER XLIII.

The first visit paid by the members of our expedition was to the Telegraph Office, to announce to their friends in France and England their safe arrival at Khartoum. The despatches had to be couched in Arabic, and were forwarded by Assouan, in Upper Egypt, to Alexandria, whence the clerks, after having translated them, transmitted them to Europe.

From the telegraph office, the whole party proceeded to the French Consulate, where each one found his or her expected letter. Even M. de Morin's valet had a missive or two, addressed to Mohammed-Abd-el-Gazal, dragoman, but Joseph, after his misadventures in El-Hejaz, had renounced all claim to this style and title. He loathed the Bedouins as much as he had formerly loved them, and he at once, without reading it, tore up the letter addressed to him by his former instructor in Arabic.

Amongst their correspondence, MM. de Morin, Périères, and Delange found a letter from M. de Pommerelle, addressed to all three of them, and together they perused the latest news from their beloved city. The very paper had a perfume of Paris, wafted to them through space into the centre of Africa, and was, in itself, a source of enjoyment.

"You are angels!" wrote M. de Pommerelle. "Forgive my former abuse, for I am heart-broken at the idea of having written a harsh word to such friends as you. I thank you a thousand times for your letters, and the records of your travel. As yet I have only read Périères, but I feel that de Morin and Delange are on their way to me. I put implicit faith in their promises, and I am revelling in a foretaste of their narrations.

"If you only knew with what delight I welcome the arrival of the post from Egypt! Do not, however, imagine that I am selfish enough to reserve to myself the pleasure of living with you. No—I share that with another of my friends, and there are two of us to read you. Read you, did I say? We spell you, syllable by syllable, and follow you step by step on the maps which are hung in every corner of my room.

"I need hardly tell you the name of this friend, for you must have guessed it already—it is the trusty Doctor Desrioux, who longed to accompany you, and whom duty alone retained in France. I only knew him slightly before—knew him as a genial, charming companion, sincere and worthy of all respect. The wish to talk about you, and to amuse ourselves with your interesting trip has drawn us together, and now we are inseparable.

"'Where are they?' says the Doctor. 'At Berber, I suppose.' 'No,' I reply, 'I know de Morin, he is an eccentric genius; by this time

he has involved them in some fresh scrape, and they are still far from the Nile.' 'Perhaps you are right,' answers the Doctor. 'Let us find the exact spot were they halted last.' Behold us, armed with our eye-glasses, bending over the maps and on the road with you.

"Our journey is not as fatiguing as yours, I admit. Instead of pitching our tents in the desert or on the mountains we content ourselves with sticking large-headed, many-coloured pins to mark your different halting-places. Of late we have been ashamed of this passive travelling, and, after a good dinner, excited by your letters, and enamoured of your descriptions, we suddenly conceived the idea of joining you. Yes, my dear friends, joining you in Africa, at Khartoum! 'They were screwed,' you will exclaim. I was, perhaps, a little gone, but I assure you that Desrioux was as sober as a judge. He spoke quite seriously, adding that his usual patients, the poor, were, for the time being, in the enjoyment of perfect health, that his mother had never been better in her life, and that he could, without fear or imprudence, leave her for a few months.

"'How long would it take us to reach Khartoum?' he continued. 'Five or six weeks at the most, if we do not stop anywhere, but hurry through the country and scatter our money by the handfull. We could spend a fortnight with our friends and be back in Paris within three months.'

"He grew quite hot and excited over the idea,

and so did I, so much so that when we separated, at about 3 a.m., our prompt departure was all arranged.

"On the following morning, when I was still in bed, and cogitating over our plans, not quite so enthusiastic, perhaps, as I had been the night before, but still firm in my purpose, the Doctor was announced. He came to tell me that since the previous evening several cases of small-pox had been brought into hospital, that there were fears of an epidemic, and that he did not think himself justified in leaving Paris before these fears had subsided. I can assure you that this was no protest for getting out of the affair, for he appeared very doleful, and repeated over and over again.

"'This idea had made me so happy, and here I am dying of despondency and grief!'

"The fact is that Desrioux is a right-down good fellow, but cheeriness is not one of his strong points. I believe that his wandering instincts are as strong as my sedentary ones, that he is weary of being tied down to the same spot, and that his burning desire is to see those countries about which you discourse so charmingly.

"The small-pox epidemic was only too serious, and, out of regard for you, it had evidently awaited your departure to declare itself. It is committing fearful havoc, and is, this year, more than usually malignant and contagious. Consequently the poor Doctor no longer thinks about leaving; he is too busy for that. He

visits every hospital, garret, and den; and, thanks to his entire forgetfulness of self, his science, and the calm courage with which he confronts and braves every danger, he has succeeded in saving a number of poor sufferers who had been given over by their regular attendants.

"As for myself, always an outrageously useless member of society, but especially so in times of epidemic, I hinted to myself one day that the air of Paris was becoming unwholesome, and I made up my mind to betake myself to some more genial clime.

"You don't believe me? You remember what I wrote to you about Trouville. Well, this time, I got as far as— I will not tell you all at once, lest you should be unjust enough not to believe me. Either your example made me brave, or the small-pox made a coward of me—whichever it was, I packed up my traps. Yes, I did, with all due deference to you, and I took my ticket for Lyons, so as to be nearer to you. One never knows, said I to myself, what may happen; once on the shores of the Mediterranean, I may, perhaps, eventually find myself at Khartoum.

"Moreover, I hit upon a capital plan for getting away as far as possible. Instead of taking a morning train, as I did when I went— I mean, when I attempted to go to Trouville, I followed your example and took the night mail. I engaged a sleeping compartment all to myself, and went regularly to bed. You see my idea,

do you not? I reckoned on my habitual laziness to prevent my attempting to rise when once I had laid down. And so it happened that 11 a.m., on the following day found me still asleep—at Marseilles!

"Yes, I, Pommerelle, I have set eyes on Carcassonne. I beg your pardon, I was thinking of the song. I mean, I have seen Marseilles!

"Since I arrived I have been strolling on the quay *de la Jolliette*, and watching the steamers of the Messageries Maritimes. If one of them had only taken it into its head to get up steam and start at once I should have jumped on board, and the thing would have been over, because, unless I threw myself into the sea, which is against my principles, I must have gone as far as Egypt. But there was no steamer for forty-eight hours, and that was asking too much of me. Home-sickness once more claimed me for its own; I sought for Paris, and Paris only, at every turn. I cried aloud for Paris, and the echoes of the Cannebière alone responded. From that moment I was lost.

"Nevertheless, I did not withdraw myself from you too abruptly. I went to the railway station and took my ticket for Monte-Carlo, where I was sure to stumble across some acquaintance, good, bad, or indifferent.

"What splendid vegetation! What a sky! What flowers! What trees! What an idea all this gives one of the tropics! How wonderfully happy you fellows must be, living in the

midst of nature, real, unsophisticated nature. I was in the seventh heaven of delight, and I said, 'If it is so pretty here, what sights they must be seeing beyond there!' And, upon my word, without any further ado I sent Doctor Desrioux a whole series of telegrams in the laconic, or negro style—'I determined—start—Africa. You leave small-pox—join me—Monte-Carlo.'

"But Desrioux did not turn up, and, whilst I was waiting for him I was cleaned out at roulette and trente-et-quarante. I was, therefore, obliged to set out speedily on my return to Paris, where I found the small-pox on the decline, and Doctor Desrioux in the zenith of his fame, for from chevalier he had just been promoted to be an officer of the Legion of Honour.

"And that, my dear fellows, is all that I have to say to you. You see that I have been very close to you. Scarcely four hundred leagues divided us. I do not despair of joining you one day. What I have already done is stupendous! As far as Monte-Carlo! I cannot get over it! Let me come to it by degrees—every year I will manage a few extra kilometres, and, in twenty years' time, I shall be up to a journey worth talking about."

MM. de Morin and Périères, like men of honour, or, at all events, adversaries who no longer feared a rival, read to Madame de Guéran the passages in this letter which referred to Dr. Desrioux.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The intimacy which, since their departure from Paris, had always existed between Madame de Guéran, Miss Poles, and their three fellow-travellers, at Khartoum appeared scarcely so close. The Baroness had expressed a wish to live alone with her companion, and for that purpose had taken a species of little villa on the bank of the Blue River, surrounded by a magnificent garden, and almost hidden by a mass of date and palm trees.

Madame de Guéran, however, did not seem to have isolated herself for the sake of peace and quietness. If she did not frequent Khartoum to any great extent, and very rarely left her own domicile, she received, every day, a great number of visitors. Putting aside the English and French Consuls and the various Consular agents, who thought themselves bound to offer her their services, she opened her doors eagerly to every European traveller who expressed a wish to be introduced to her. Nor did she in many cases wait for the expression of such a wish, but sent out her invitations spontaneously.

It was in this way that she became acquainted with an English officer, who, after having left Baker south of Gondokoro, was on his way to

Cairo to take up an appointment in the service of the Khedive, and, afterwards, with one of the members of the expedition under Lieutenant Cameron, Dr. Dillon, and Mr. Murphy. This traveller had entered Africa by Zanzibar, and had seen the great lakes, but fever had compelled him to return northwards, and he had left his companions.

Madame de Guéran was not satisfied with talking to these distinguished guests only. She sent Miss Beatrice Poles, and Omar and Ali, the two interpreters, in search of every person who, in any capacity, had accompanied Europeans, during the preceding year, in expeditions towards the south. She questioned them very closely and at great length about the person or persons whom they had escorted, and if the portrait they drew was devoid of personal interest to her, she examined them on a thousand and one details, and made them go into every minute particular of their travels.

The expedition of Schweinfurth, who had lived for several years amongst the Nuehr, Djour, Bongo, and Niam-Niam tribes, was of special interest to her, and she was loud in her expressions of gratitude to Ali when, on a certain occasion, that interpreter brought with him an old soldier of the Dinha tribe, who was reported to have accompanied the great German traveller as far as the territory of the Monbuttoos, within three degrees of the Equator, and who had returned to Khartoum with his master in July of the preceding year, 1871.

The conversation of this man became of such engrossing interest to Madame de Guéran that very soon she talked with him alone, and left all her other visitors out in the cold.

At the same time her character appeared to become completely metamorphosed. If, during the progress of the voyage, she had occasionally seemed nervous, such occasions had been exceptional; as a rule (nearly always, in fact) her manner had been easy, light-hearted and frank.

She appeared to have forgotten that she was a woman and beloved, and, without the least affectation, she treated MM. Morin and Périères as friends, and set her wits to work to pass herself off with them as a good fellow and a boon companion.

Now, on the contrary, she avoided their society, got out of their way, and seemed actually to dread meeting them. Any one, seeing her, would have said that she had some confidential communication to make to them, some secret to unfold, but that she lacked the courage to speak.

On their side, MM. de Morin and Périères were astonished at her mode of treating them, and took umbrage at it. Their love for Madame de Guéran was above suspicion and beyond doubt. Both of them young, rich, clever, well-born and good style, they had asked her hand in marriage; and, to please her, and in the hope of winning that hand, they had given up their cherished Parisian habits, the pleasures of the

beau monde, and had undertaken a voyage, to the dangers of which, as we have already recorded, they were fully alive. This love, the main-spring of their entire conduct and conspicuous at every turn, had naturally increased during the voyage. Men who are already in love cannot with impunity be thrown into close intimacy with the loved one, especially if they are ever of necessity summoned to her side to undergo with her the innumerable vicissitudes of travel, to follow her up hill and down dale, and to share her dangers.

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With a view to prevailing on them to accompany her to Africa, Madame de Guéran had said to them—"I do not know you sufficiently yet, and I look upon this journey as a method of instruction, so far as your characters are concerned."

She had, perhaps, become as wise as she wished to be, but all the time she was pursuing her studies they, in their turn, were learning to know her better, and to appreciate her more fully. Every time they halted she was seen in a new light. Yesterday, so to speak, she was intrepid, cool, and resolute; to-day, in the desert, with the slave caravan before her, she is once more the sympathizing, tender-hearted woman. And, moreover, under the glorious sun of Africa, in the midst of this so luxuriant Nature, her beauty was so transcendent—it

burst into full bloom—it positively shone! In the afternoon under a tent, in the evening on board their vessel, she held them captive under the spell of her feeling tones, her exquisite sensibility.

They were, consequently, but involuntarily, more in love than ever, absolutely conquered and enslaved, and they suffered, in proportion, from the coolness with which for some days past she had treated them. If they had made up their minds together to find out the cause of this, they might not, possibly, have been so uneasy, but, unfortunately, they mutually distrusted each other.

A moment's confidence would have taught them that they had equal grounds of complaint against her, and that she had put them both on identically the same footing. But love would be love no longer if it took to reasoning; it warps the finest natures, and inspires the sincerest hearts with jealousy.

M. de Morin attributed the coldness of Madame de Guéran to the love she was beginning to feel for M. Périères, and the latter in his turn, persuaded that his friend was also his successful rival, so far forgot himself as to positively detest him.

They rarely saw each other, and, when they did meet, all that passed between them was a commonplace word or two, or a frigid shake of the hand. Then each one went his own way, and, avoiding the town, betook himself to the open country, and, on the banks of the White,

or the Blue River, hid his sorrow in his own breast and mourned over his defeat.

Dr. Delange alone preserved his liberty of mind and action, and, as the inquiring traveller, pried into every corner of Khartoum. He had enlisted into his service a faki, who, for a piastre per diem, took him all over Khartoum from morning till night, and from night till morning, and initiated him into all the mysteries of that mysterious place.

One evening, his guide proposed to take him to the house of an old sorceress, or witch, of high renown throughout the district, and he gladly accepted the offer. These Egyptian women, under the protection of the authorities, to whom their various services are of great value, enjoy very extensive privileges at Khartoum, and are in constant communication with all classes of society, from the Pashas, whose harems they help to fill, to the Arabian women who go to them for medicine for their actual, and charms for their imaginary, ills.

To these secret sources of employment they add others even less reputable, but equally connived at by the powers that be, one of them being the proprietorship of music and dancing halls, where the dances of the country are exhibited by a dozen or more young girls, for the most part natives of the Soudan.

Into one of these dens M. Delange made his way, and, for a few piastres, witnessed an entertainment which gold would not have procured for him in any other town but Khartoum.

He was shown into a spacious room furnished with low and roomy Arab lounges. The walls, painted white, were brilliant with resinous torches of great illuminating power.

A door opened, and in walked the mistress of the place, a woman of about thirty, tall, thin, copper-coloured, and hard-featured. Her regular, but strange, cast of countenance, and the gold circlet, in the shape of a diadem, which decked the long bands of her plaited hair, drawn flat across her temples, made her look like some old Egyptian queen. In her hand she held a small whip, her conductor's *bâton*.

After having cringingly saluted M. Delange, she squatted down in a corner, and, at a word from her, eight slaves, who had been awaiting her summons, appeared on the scene. They were enveloped in the *fezdah*, a large piece of linen fringed on both edges.

At a fresh signal they laid aside this garment and appeared in the *raat*, their orthodox dancing costume, made of leather, and of somewhat scanty dimensions.

They were black as ebony, but with nothing of the negro type about them—on the contrary, their noses were straight, their mouths small, and their faces oval. Their figures were perfect, and their beauty altogether was on a par with their youth.

Each of them danced in turn, without any musical accompaniment, her companions meanwhile grouping themselves in a circle round her, and encouraging her with their savage shouts,

and by clapping their hands together. Gradually her body turns, her knees are bent, and her arms become rigid. She seems to be trying to resist some magnetic force which slowly draws her on towards one corner of the room. She advances, step by step, trembling in every limb, always following the gaze of her companions, and swayed by their shouts, which degenerate into howls like those of a wild beast.

The woman in the diadem has not left her place; she squats in the same corner, but her yells mingle with the others, and her gaze, fixed on the dancer, seems to mesmerize her. Her right arm is extended at full length, and her claw-like fingers nervously clutch the leathern-thonged whip.

Finally, the dancer, weary of struggling, appears to yield to the influences which surround her, and to obey orders mysteriously conveyed to her, and she ends by falling exhausted at the feet of the spectator in whose honour the entertainment has been given.

M. Delange might very well have had enough of dancing, but he was bent on seeing everything and comparing everything. So having made the acquaintance of these dancing slaves, he thought he would see what the dancing girls, who are their own mistresses, the Almehs to wit, were like. He wished to ascend from the black to the copper-coloured votaries of Terpsichore, and his visit to this other locality in Khartoum was within an ace of having a very disastrous result.

CHAPTER XLV.

The guide whom M. Delange had hired, before fulfilling his engagement with regard to the Almehs, suggested a visit to a slave-merchant. In obedience to the orders of the Khedive, public sales are forbidden by the Governor, and have been so for some years past, but certain houses known to, and tolerated by the police, have ever been and will always be devoted to the exchange or the sale of slaves, new and old. At the door of one of these houses, a sombre-looking building in a dismal, narrow street, the guide stopped, and, after having knocked in a peculiar way, the door was opened.

M. Delange, who was made to pass in first, was shown along a dimly-lighted passage, and emerged into a court-yard surrounded by high walls. The master of the house quickly came out to meet his fresh customers, as he thought. The animal predominated in his countenance, and his eyes were small, with red-rimmed lids, his nose hooked, his lips colourless and thin, his skin yellow, and his beard sparse and reddish. The guide took him aside and whispered a few words in his ear, explaining, doubtless, that he had not brought with him a purchaser, but merely a traveller anxious for information

and ready to pay high for a cursory inspection of what was to be seen.

Accustomed to these visits, from which he derived a certain revenue, the man at once proceeded to display his wares. First of all he conducted his visitor towards some mud hovels built against the walls. He opened a door, and about a score of negresses were exposed to view, some half-naked and the remainder clothed in garments of a dirty yellow. Many of them were nursing children, and others, lying here and there, were sleeping, as negroes so well know how to sleep, so soundly that nothing disturbed them. A few laughed carelessly as they saw M. Delange, and showed their white teeth.

"I have something better than this," said the merchant.

For the fun of the thing he had first of all exposed only his inferior brands, commercially speaking. He was now about to display his choice goods.

He led the Doctor to another shed, where several purchasers were already congregated. A slave was at that moment being led up and down before them, just as a horse-dealer trots out the animal he may have for sale. She was a fine, handsome girl, a massive creature, an Abyssinian Roman Catholic, as one of the by-standers informed the Doctor.

The buyers, as soon as she was brought to a standstill, went up to her, opened her mouth to look at her teeth, undid her hair to examine its

texture, and slapped her on the back and chest to see if she had any latent defects. Insensible, apparently at all events, to all this, the wretched girl was perfectly mute, and made no sign. After much parleying, further most minute examination, and biddings and counter-biddings, she fell at last to the nod of an Arab of about fifty, as ugly as she was handsome. He threw a veil over her head, and over her shoulders a covering which he had brought with him, and, after having paid over the price, he ordered his new slave to follow him. She obeyed, silent and passive as ever.

"I have something better even than that," said the merchant, trying to squeeze out a smile, which after all was nothing better than a hideous grimace.

M. Delange crossed a court-yard, and went up sundry flights of a worm-eaten staircase. A negro eunuch hastened to open a door, and the doctor found himself in a spacious, lofty apartment, without any windows, but lighted from above.

A dozen girls, draped in voluminous folds of blue, white, and rose-coloured muslin, fastened round their waists, lay reclining on an old circular divan, the only piece of furniture in the room. As soon as they saw their master they stood up altogether, like automatons, and ranged themselves against the wall, in positions which had evidently been assigned to them beforehand.

Then the merchant, followed by his visitor,

passed them in review, stopping before each one, and expatiating on her merits. There were specimens there to please all tastes—slim and stout, short and tall, black, copper-coloured, yellow, bronze, and white. There were straight noses and flat, thick lips and mouths exquisitely small, round eyes, almond-shaped, and some with oblique lids, such as are met with in Jara. From an artistic point of view it was a pretty sight, and the oldest of these girls was not yet twenty. Over that age a woman is old in the East; nobody would buy her as a slave, unless indeed she happened to be a good musician, a clever sempstress, or a first-rate cook. Slaves are most valuable when from eleven to fifteen years of age. They are then called *sedassi*, before eleven *commassi*, and from fifteen to twenty *balègues*. After twenty they are, as we say of horses, "aged."

The whole establishment had now been inspected, and M. Delange, slipping a couple of piastres into the merchant's expectant hand, left the place, his heart moved to pity by the sight he had just witnessed.

A company of Almehs, to whom his guide, adhering to his programme, next took him, were destined to modify his impressions considerably. Now-a-days if you wish to see the genuine Almehs, you must visit Khartoum, for they have for some time past been driven out from Upper Egypt. Those whom travellers see at Cairo are simply courtesans, who call themselves Almehs, just as their counterparts

in India call themselves bayaderes. The real Almeh or *a'ouâlem*, dates from the times of the Pharaohs, and forms a distinct class. She has been educated to a certain extent, and is frequently a good musician. She never marries, at all events so long as she follows her profession, and is noticeable for her independent bearing. Apart from her profession she forms a part of the *demi-monde* of her country, and, when very talented, or very lovely, frequently and rapidly becomes rich.

The house to which the faki conducted M. Delange was in a court-yard not far from the slave-merchant's place of business, in a street as narrow and gloomy as his, but more remote from the centre of the town, and opening on to one of the quays of the Blue River.

After some preliminary overtures, for access to an Oriental interior, of whatever kind it may be, is always difficult, M. Delange was allowed to enter a large room where a troupe of Almehs were going through the customary exercises in the presence of about twenty spectators, Arabs mostly, seated on roomy *angarebs*, drinking coffee and smoking chibouks.

In large censers, on copper plates covered in with arabesques, Eastern perfumes were burning, the smoke from which ascended in spiral columns, and mingling with that from the chibouks, created a tolerably dense cloud. In spite of the vapour surrounding him, M. Delange, as he took his seat, thought he could recognize, amongst the spectators, a well-

known face or two. He thought for some time, called on his memory to aid him, and soon hit the right nail on the head. The man who had particularly attracted his attention was none other than the chief of the caravan which he and his friends had attacked in the desert of Bahiouda. Three of his men were with him.

These fellows, despoiled of their slaves, and without any object in continuing their journey towards northern Nubia, had thought fit to wend their way to Khartoum, only a few miles distant from the spot where they were released. Unfortunately, if the Doctor had picked them out from amongst their co-religionists and friends, they had, in their turn, with far greater facility recognized the European who had, alone and unexpectedly, made his appearance amongst them. They might, no doubt, have already met in the streets of Khartoum the man who had helped to ruin them and take from them the goodly caravan on which they had built such extravagant expectations, but it would have been imprudent in that case to attack him. Now he was at their mercy ; fate, to which all Orientals attribute such unlimited power, had delivered him into their hands. They addressed a silent thanksgiving to the Prophet, and, under their breath, whilst smoking their chibouks, they plotted a terrible revenge.

The Almehs went on with their dancing, accompanying themselves with the *tar*, a species

of tambourine, and copper castanets, called in Arabic *saganet* or *sadjar*. Their plaintive, monotonous chant lulled the senses, and produced a feeling of languor, possessing an indescribable charm. Their dance is varied; the feet play their part, and do not appear rivetted to the floor, as was the case with the bayaderes and the black slaves. It is more active, and has more movement in it, but without in the least degree resembling our European ballets. Certain movements, certain poses, rather recall the Spanish fandango, or would do so if the Almeh had a *vis-à-vis* of the masculine gender, but they invariably dance with others of their own sex.

When M. Delange entered this sanctuary, they were finishing the sword dance, the sword at times being brandished above their heads and flashing in the light, and sometimes being brought down as if to despatch a fallen foe. After a short interval, they commenced the bee-dance, very celebrated amongst the Turks. To understand this pantomime, somewhat difficult to describe, a too inquisitive bee must be supposed to have lighted on the Almeh, and to defy all her efforts to drive it away. The insect settles at first amongst the gold-entwined locks of the dancer, and on the scarlet velvet *tarbouck*, but, driven from this refuge, it descends, little by little to the neck, arms, and shoulders. The dancer, to get rid of her importunate visitor, divests herself of her veil, her necklace, her bracelets and her rings.

The bee, thus pursued, becomes bolder and more enraged, and hides beneath the richly embroidered bodice. Determined to get rid of her enemy, the Almeh sacrifices this garment also, and it is thrown down on the floor to keep company with the veil and the other ornaments.

And so the pursuit was going on, but M. Delange thought it had gone far enough and retired, considering, and rightly, too, that this species of manifestation in public is entirely devoid of attraction.

He left, therefore, before the end, and without noticing that the gentlemen of the caravan rose at the same time and glided behind him along the wall. When he gained the door of the house, he called out for his guide, looked about for some time in vain, and at last set out alone on his return to his domicile. But, scarcely had he gone a dozen yards along the street, when five or six individuals, starting at once from different hiding-places, sprang out from beneath the shadow of the wall, threw themselves upon him before he had time to defend himself, stopped his mouth with a gag, bound him hand and foot, and carried him off in the direction of the Nile.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Before setting out on his expedition to the slave-merchant and the Almehs, the Doctor asked M. de Morin to go with him, but the invitation was declined with thanks. The young painter, as we have before remarked, had not for some time past been in the humour to partake of any pleasure that Khartoum could offer him. None of the curious sights of the place had any charms for him, and he did not take the slightest interest in unravelling those mysteries which M. Delange, for the purpose of cheering him up and rousing him from his apathy, from time to time described. On the evening when his friend made this latest suggestion to him, he was less disposed than ever to listen. For several days past he had had recourse to the favourite device of lovers—avoiding the beloved one, abstaining from paying her any visits, giving no sign of existence, waiting to be summoned. But Madame de Guéran did not appear to notice his disappearance, and pursued the even tenor of her way, just as if he had no existence so far as she was concerned. How could she have become so completely indifferent to what became of him ? She was not bound to love him,

he was quite aware of that, and she had a perfect right to prefer somebody else. But, at the same time, had she any right to carry to such an extreme her indifference for the man who had sacrificed everything to accompany her, and to share her fatigues and her dangers? Surely, even as a mere travelling companion he was worth the display of a little interest.

Nay, more, in defiance of all her promises she was already displaying her preference for M. Périères! She had not even waited until the journey should be more advanced, but at the very first stage of any importance, in the first town where she had stayed for any time, she threw aside all reserve, made no secret of her choice, and, whilst opening her heart to one admirer, banished the other for ever and a day! Ought she not, at all events, to have frankly sent for him, told him how the case stood, and offered him his liberty?

Or did she think that on their present terms he was going with her to the very heart of Africa, the end of the world, perhaps, to watch over her and the man she loved, to shield them from every danger, to save their precious lives, and with them to return to Paris to be present at their marriage, after having been a witness to their protracted love-making! No, a thousand times, no! he would leave her, flee from her, return to France, to Paris, forget her, plunge into the vortex of pleasure, stifle his passion, and harden his heart so as never to suffer for another what he had gone through for her.

But, before he took himself off, he was anxious to put all these thoughts into words, to reproach her with her want of candour towards him, with having caused him to appear in a perfectly ridiculous light, with having forgotten all the claims of friendship, with having treated him as an ordinary acquaintance, or a too persistent companion, with having sacrificed him entirely to the man who had won her love, and all this without one kind word, without a single expression of regret. The reproaches he would utter, the withering words he would hurl at her, straight to her face! And not to her alone would he speak! She was not the only one to blame, she was not the only false friend, Périères, too, had deceived and betrayed him!

He did not reproach him for being beloved. But why had he not come forward openly and said—"I have succeeded more quickly than I anticipated. You are no longer in the betting. Banish all hope from your heart. Drive away this love, against which you struggle now; later on it would have killed you." But, no; like Madame de Guéran, M. Périères preferred to keep by his side his companion, the friend ready to do any deed of devotion. It was shameful to act thus in the exceptional circumstances in which they were placed! If such want of confidence, such caution, such hypocrisy, and such cowardice pass muster in the world, in the drawing-rooms and boudoirs of Parisian society, they ought not to exist between friends who have together braved death and are ready

to brave it again, between wanderers on a savage Continent, in a deadly climate!

He went in search of his rival, so that he might cast on him all this reproach and abuse, and he was inclined to be the more violent, because at the bottom of his heart he was conscious of a feeling that he was both unjust and absurd. For was not M. Périères perfectly right to be reticent about his success, out of respect to Madame de Guéran? But what did M. de Morin care about respect, or truth, or propriety? He was jealous, his mental vision was obscured, he had lost his head.

Just as he was leaving the house he saw the interpreter Ali getting off his horse, and he asked him if he knew whether M. Périères had gone out since sunset, and, if so, in what direction.

"I have just met him on the quay," replied the interpreter. "He was going along the road leading to Madame de Guéran's house.

"I might have known as much," said M. de Morin to himself. "I was a fool to ask the question."

And, trembling with rage, he asked—

"How long ago is it since you saw him?"

"About ten minutes."

"On horseback?"

"No, he was on foot."

"I must speak with him. Lend me your horse, and I will try to overtake him."

The interpreter obeyed, and M. de Morin set off at a hand-gallop in the direction of the Blue River.

He overtook M. Périères just as that individual reached Madame de Guéran's house, and was about to enter. Leaping from his horse he joined his former friend, who, on seeing him, stopped and smiled sarcastically.

"You are calling on the Baroness?" said the young painter, in an unsteady voice.

"That is evident," replied the man of letters, calmer, but quite as pale as his interlocutor, "and you are, doubtless, on the same errand as myself?"

"Identically the same," replied M. de Morin. They looked at each other. One word more, and these two men, who in reality esteemed each other, who had conceived and still entertained a sincere affection for each other—these two men, carried away by their passion, forgetful of the past, feverish with anxiety, and madly in love, were on the point of doing each other one of those mortal injuries which it is impossible to pardon, or to forget.

Fortunately, M. Périères retained just enough self-control to say to M. de Morin—

"Some explanation between us is necessary and desirable. Do you wish it to take place in this house—in the presence of the lady who lives here?"

"Certainly," said M. de Morin; "I will follow you."

On entering the garden they perceived one of the Nubians in the service of Madame de Guéran, and M. Périères was about to commission this woman to inform the Baroness of

their presence, when M. de Morin stopped him.

"No," he said, "I see Madame de Guéran down there by that clump of trees, and I prefer going to her without giving her the opportunity of declining to see me."

"Not very often the case, as far as you are concerned," said M. Périères. "However, we will not be announced. Come along."

They were both of them actuated by precisely the same sentiments, they were experiencing a similar fear, and partaking of an equal amount of jealousy, but they remained utterly ignorant of the fact, and each of them was secretly in his heart reproaching the other for his duplicity, his cunning, and, above all, his victory.

Madame de Guéran rose as soon as she saw her visitors, and went quickly to meet them. She seemed very much agitated, and deeply affected.

"Ah!" she said, hurriedly. "You have done well to come, and to come together. I had reckoned upon postponing my interview with you until to-morrow, but I am anxious to have done with my irresolution. Chance has brought about a meeting, and I will explain myself this evening."

"When you allude to chance," observed M. de Morin, "you, doubtless, address yourself to me?"

"No," she said quietly, "I address myself to both of you. Why should I address you in

preference to M. Périères? But what is the matter with you both? I declare I should not know you."

The sky was studded with stars of marvellous brightness, and Laura de Guéran, who had just raised her eyes to look at her two companions, was able to observe their pallor and their pained expression.

At the same time, she thought she could understand the meaning of the change, and, candid and out-spoken as ever, she said sweetly and kindly, but in a sad, broken voice—

"You are annoyed with me, are you not, for having remained so long without seeing you; for having shut my door against you, and having treated you as strangers—you, for whom I have so sincere a regard? Ah! if you only knew what I have undergone. But you were the last persons to whom I should have dared to confide my uncertainty, my fears, my hopes. I could only impart to you the result of my inquiries and my proceedings, and I have known that result but for a few hours. I was nerving myself to tell you all—to summon you—when you appeared. Now, I have no longer any right to be silent—I must divulge my secret."

She stopped, and they dared not reply, so deeply had her sympathetic, moving voice touched them, so strange was the emotion she aroused within them. Already their suffering had decreased, already were they reproaching themselves for their jealousy. She, who spoke

to them and looked at them as she was then doing, could not be guilty of treason, either in love or friendship. They had accused her falsely, led away, blinded, and rendered unjust and cruel by their passion. But what was the secret she was about to entrust to their keeping? They longed in trembling anxiety to hear it.

She resumed, and her uneasiness was now equal to their own. She seemed to suffer from being compelled to speak as she was about to do, and blamed herself for the trouble she knew she should bring upon them. Her voice had lost its firmness, her countenance its composure, and her look its candour.

"First of all," she said, "let me tell you how deeply I regret having induced you to leave your country and enter on a life of adventure, without any object, as far as you are concerned, and—without any hope. My only idea, I assure you, was to undertake a journey, a pilgrimage, if you will, but a pilgrimage to a tomb where I had the right to kneel without wounding you. To-day the situation is changed, and you can no longer accompany me. I must continue on my way alone, and without your help go onwards towards the goal which I wish —which I ought to reach. I thank you with all my heart for your devotion to me, for the kindly affection you have ever displayed towards me. But, my dear companions, my valued friends, I must leave you, and you must forget

me. My destiny is no longer my own to shape."

And as, pale, trembling, and unable to utter a word, they looked at her with anxiously inquiring gaze, she added timidly, nervously, without even stopping to take breath—

"I am not a widow. My husband, the victim of his devotion to science and his own personal bravery, is still alive, a prisoner in a country where no one had previously dared to penetrate. I must rescue him—I must save him. I am determined to do it, and I must say farewell to you."

CHAPTER XLVII.

The revelation just made by Madame de Guéran to MM. Périères and de Morin was certainly calculated to drive them to despair. If they had had any doubts about the power she exercised over them, their feelings and sufferings during the past few days would have removed them all. They were as deeply, seriously in love as it was possible for men to be; absolutely conquered and enslaved. And it was at this very moment, when they were acknowledging to themselves their defeat and the intensity of their love, that they heard her say—"Give up all hope, give me up, for I belong no more to myself!"

The blow, however, was not so severe as they might have supposed, because its effect had been weakened, deadened by the revulsion of feeling they had just experienced. For had they not sought Madame de Guéran for the sole purpose of heaping reproaches upon her, complaining of her treason, and saying farewell to her? They had looked upon her as lost after the cruellest fashion, M. de Morin picturing himself as sacrificed to M. Périères, and the latter, on the other hand, assuming that his rival was the lucky man, the victor, and the husband elect. Jealousy is the legitimate

offspring of wounded *amour-propre*, the two sentiments depend on one another, are natural to each other, and one springs from the other. Get rid of *amour-propre*, and jealousy will disappear; do away with jealousy, and the most unhappy love will, at all events, be calm and tranquil. Say to love—"Your beloved will not have anything to say to you because she loves another"—and off he will go in desperation, meditating revenge or suicide, according to his temperament. But say to him—"This woman keeps you at a distance simply because she neither can nor will belong to any one; she loves you, but she will never tell you so, nor will she allow you to tell her"—and away goes his anger; he loves still, perhaps may love always, but quietly and resignedly.

MM. Périères and de Morin had experienced the first of these feelings; they had now arrived at the second, and there they stopped. Madame de Guéran had certainly banished them and treated them with coldness, but she had neither deceived nor betrayed them. Each of them might still suppose himself to be preferred before his rival. They were neither of them being sacrificed to any particular person, but to an idea, a vague hope, an abstract and almost legendary husband.

The two young men no longer looked at each other so fiercely as they had done some moments previously. On the contrary, they appeared anxious for an excuse to be near each other, and to exchange a smile and a warm shake of

the hand, such as had of late been conspicuous by their absence. They looked like two friends delighted at seeing each other again after a long absence.

A tender expression stole into their eyes as they turned them towards the Baroness. How could they have suspected that charming woman? How could they have allowed themselves for a moment to doubt that character, so open, so firm, so straightforward? Was she the woman to deceive them, to play them false, or to lower herself?

They all three looked at each other stealthily—she, overcome by the revelation she had just made, and they, ashamed of their suspicion, their jealousy, and their anger. At length, M. de Morin thought it time to speak.

"You have said," he commenced, with a still rather unsteady voice, "that we must quit you and return to France, leaving you to pursue your journey, run all sorts of danger, and face death itself, perhaps, alone. We will discuss that question when the proper time comes; for the present we can put it aside. First of all allow me to presume on our friendship so far as to ask you for a few details in connection with the circumstance you have just mentioned. M. de Guéran lives, so you say; how do you know that it is so? How far can you put any faith in the reports which are current with regard to his resurrection, hitherto unrevealed?"

"I have irrefutable proofs," answered Madame de Guéran, "not that M. de Guéran lives, but that

he did not die at the time, nor at the place, nor in the manner he was reported to have died. According to these reports, his death took place in October, 1871. Well, he wrote to me in January, 1872! He was said to have been buried in the Bongo country, the goal of my pilgrimage, as I told you some time ago. That country was traversed by him in safety, and long after the day on which he was supposed to have died, he was seen in the territory of the Monbuttoos!"

"Who saw him?" asked M. Périères.

"A man worthy of all credence, sent to me with his strongest recommendations, a negro of the Dinka tribe and an old soldier taken by Schweinfurth into his service as guide and interpreter."

"How was it, then, that Schweinfurth, who was in these countries you mention in 1871, and whom you, as you have told us, went to Germany to see, did not give you any information about M. de Guéran?"

"That is easily explained. Schweinfurth, it is true, travelled through these countries in 1871, but he was then on his way back to Khartoum, which he reached on the 21st June. In the beginning of the preceding year, failing to obtain from Munza, King of the Monbuttoos, permission to continue his journey southwards, he left his territory and proceeded northwards, in company with his friend, Aboo-Sammit, the ivory merchant."

"Granted," replied M. Périères, "but how

does it happen that the servant, to whom you have alluded, is better informed than his master? How did he manage to see amongst the Monbuttoos a European whom Schweinfurth could not possibly meet, because at that time he was in the midst of other tribes?"

"The reply to that is still easier. The man in question, whose name is Nassar, did not leave at the same time with the rest of the caravan, because Aboo-Sammit had entrusted him with the superintendence of one of those branches which, in furtherance of his business, he establishes in the various fresh countries to which he extends his operations. It was at this place, where he remained for eighteen months with the same Nubian soldiers, and which is situated between the third and fourth degree north of the Equator, and the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh of longitude, east of the meridian of Paris—it was here that, in January, 1872, a caravan, under the command of a white man, asked for shelter for a few hours. This man, this European, was my husband! I could not doubt either the description of him given by Nassar, or the few hasty lines that M. de Guéran scribbled in his memorandum-book and entrusted to his host."

"And why," asked M. de Morin, "did not this man contrive in some way or other that those lines should reach you?"

"For many reasons, amongst which due allowance must be made for the apathy and indifference of Orientals in general, and negroes in particular. We in England were, at one

time, for two years without news of Livingstone, and we believed him dead because a man, implicitly trusted by him, neglected to send his despatches to Europe. But the best reason of all is this: the address, written in pencil upon a scrap of paper, had, through constant exposure to tropical sun and rain, become partly illegible."

"He should have taken it, even if it had been only a single word, on his return to Khartoum, to some Consul," observed M. Périères, "who would doubtless have deciphered it, and would possibly have concluded that it came from M. de Guéran, in which case your mind would have been at rest long ago."

"Very true, but would the Consul have given Nassar his anticipated reward? Once more, my friend, you are excluding from your calculations the rapacity of certain negro tribes; you forget that they turn everything into money, that they sell the right of passing through and of remaining in their country, and that they will let you perish in misery and want if you cannot give them a piece of copper, or an armlet, or some cowries, in exchange for the meat and drink you so sorely need. Nassar preferred to wait until somebody came forward to purchase his letter, and his calculations were tolerably accurate, seeing that I have paid him a very high price for it."

"Then," asked M. de Morin, "you have no longer any doubt? It was really your husband's handwriting—you recognized it?"

"Perfectly; and, more than that, I recognize,

too, the train of thought I knew so well for two years of my life. In a few touching lines, he asks my forgiveness again for having left me so abruptly, and having dared to undertake such a journey. He left me, he says, with the intention of revisiting, for the last time, the districts he had formerly explored, and of taking a final farewell of them. According to his first idea his absence would not have been of long duration, but the exploration fever, that species of madness which draws people towards the unknown, had seized upon him, carried him away like a whirlwind, and taken him far from his intended track. I have often heard discussions upon that strange attraction to which we owe many of the discoveries made during the last half century. When once a man has tasted Africa he longs to get back to it. Livingstone passed twenty years of his life there. Mdlle. Tinne returned thither three times, and Speke was on his way back when he was accidentally shot. Baker managed to get himself made a general in the Egyptian army and secured an official appointment as the leader of an expedition, in order to give himself an excuse for seeing again the sources of the Nile he is always seeking, and the splendid lakes he loves so well. Indeed, in my own case, I will not go so far as to say that I was not impelled onward by some irresistible force, independent, perhaps, of the end I had in view. But to return to the subject—in other words, my husband's letter.

"He had ascended the Nile, he writes, as far as the Gazelle River, which he thought would be completely blocked by floating vegetation, but, on the contrary, he had been able to navigate it with ease, and to reach the district of the Reks. There M. de Guéran confesses he might easily have turned back, but marvellous tales had been told him of the open districts in front of him. He could not fight against his longing, his morbid passion, his folly, whatever it may please you to call it, and he set out. He assures me that he wrote to me when with the Dinkas, the Djours, and the Niam-Niam. Not one of those letters have I ever received, and that is not to be wondered at, seeing that an accident alone has put me in possession of his last.

"He concludes by telling me that he has gone too far to put back, and that he has neither the courage nor the right to retrace his steps just at the moment when he is on the point of reaching his goal, and solving those problems which have so long been under investigation. Indeed, he is the first European who has passed beyond the Monbuttoo territory, and everything is conjecture in connection with the territories extending thence for some degrees south-east and south-west. If he succeeds, he says, in passing through certain districts, up to the present time supposed to be impassable, he does not despair of reaching the Blue Mountains, of which Baker speaks, of crossing the Albert Nyanza, and so reaching in succession the Victoria Nyanza, Kazé, and Zanzibar. If he is

induced to penetrate still farther southwards, he will make for the Lake Tanganyïka, explored by Livingstone; and if westward, for the banks of the Congo and the Atlantic Ocean. Finally, he bids me adieu, and asks me once more to forgive him."

Madame de Guéran, who had maintained her composure wonderfully up to this point, now broke down, and could say no more. M. Périères went to her and said—

"And you are going to tempt these unknown lands, as your husband has done?"

"Yes," she replied, decisively.

"Alone?" he asked.

"With, Miss Poles, the guide who brought me M. de Guéran's letter, one or two Arab interpreters, and the caravan which they are about to organize."

"And we?"

"You cannot come with me."

"Why not?" asked M. de Morin, getting up quickly from his seat, and taking her hand in his.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Madame de Guéran was about to reply, but he did not give her time.

"Yes," he went on at once to say, "why cannot we accompany you? Why cannot Périères and I, for I see by our friend's face that he shares my feelings on this subject, why cannot we attempt an enterprise which does not appear to you to be beyond your strength? After having brought us thus far, have you, indeed, any right to send us back and say to us, 'I can do without you; you may return whence you came? I have made a pleasure trip with you, and have reached a spot arrived at by a thousand others before us. The question now is one of journeying through countries visited by three or four Europeans at most, of going still further afield into the midst of unknown tribes, into places described by geographers as unexplored regions. The pleasure trip becomes one of danger; each step along my new road is a step towards death. But I do not consider you fit to accompany me; go back to Europe and your pleasures, and let me die alone!' And we, who worship the ground you tread upon, we, to whom you are all the world, we are to obey you? Never! I tell you it is an impossibility!"

"De Morin is right," added Périères, laconically. His voice was perfectly calm, but, beneath the coldness of his tone, there lay an inflexible will and fiery enthusiasm.

In his usual excitable manner, M. de Morin continued—

"Picture to yourself what our feelings would be on the day when you leave us, and when we let you go alone. For my part, I should never dare to look Périères in the face again, and I am equally certain that he would never be able to lift his eyes to mine. We should each go on his own way, with eyes downcast, crest fallen, and blushing for very shame. When we reached Paris we should be greeted with—'What! back again already? How about the grand tour? Had it become too risky? Then why did you start? Did you not know what you had to expect? Of course you have brought your companion back with you? No! Do you mean to say that she has gone on? The courage that fails you, she has; the strength that you lack, she possesses; she does not fear death, but you did not see it in the same light. Well, every one for himself in this world. But surely, she would not have started if you had not gone with her; she relied on your assistance and support, and suddenly, you deprive her of both—it's a queer business altogether!' That, believe me, is what would be said in our club, and throughout Paris, and that is just what we do not want to have said about us.

"But hold our *amour-propre* as cheap as you

like, expose us to ridicule and contempt, if you will! Let us speak only of your opinion of us, the only opinion about which we, in reality, care one jot. We have talked of our devotion, our respect, our affection for you, and the day when you put these sentiments to real proof, you find nothing; all have vanished into thin air, respect, affection, devotion, all taken to flight! You cease to be a widow, and in twenty-four hours we cease to love you; the one woman in the world having disappeared for us, the friend disappears with her, and we have not an idea even of devoting ourselves to the friend. She held out to us the hope of a reward, the hope is taken away, everything is at an end, adieu! As she in whose service we were can no longer pay us, let her live as best she may, let her die when she will, it is no affair of ours!"

"No, we have duties to fulfil towards ourselves, towards you, and, I do not hesitate to say it, towards a fellow countryman. There is no necessity for mentioning his name, nor for saying that he is your husband. In certain situations all feelings of rivalry, jealousy, or envy disappear. A European like ourselves, a Frenchman is, perhaps, suffering, dying in a country we have heard of, and can reach. The distance which separates him from us is diminished, we have achieved a third, possibly half the journey, and we must go on to the end. We agreed to accompany you on a pilgrimage to render homage to the dead; now

we wish to, and we must, bring succour to the living. That is all I have to say to you in my own name and that of Périères. Pardon my prolixity; I cannot be silent about my feelings, a thousand thoughts course through my mind, and I cannot help putting them into words."

"And I thank you for it, my friend," said Périères, holding out his hand.

Madame de Guéran could not utter a word, but her eyes spoke her thanks.

They did not leave her until nearly midnight, after having arranged to see her again on the following day, for the purpose of conversing, together now, about the preparations for departure.

Without wishing in the least to depreciate the good qualities of MM. de Morin and Périères, without casting the slightest doubt upon their chivalrous self denial, we must, all the same, confess that they were not quite so disinterested as might be supposed. They had not, without any reservation, abandoned all hope. The woman they loved had not become, in a single moment, a simple travelling companion to whom they were going to devote themselves till death. Their passionate love could not so easily give place to an equally sincere friendship. A common thought struck them at the time the revelation was made to them, but they had not time to dwell on it, and it was out of the question that they should give expression to it before Madame de Guéran. But when they were alone, and left to themselves, it was not long before it found vent in words.

"There is nothing," said M. Périères, abruptly, "to prove that M. de Guéran is still alive."

"In reality," continued M. de Morin, as if he were speaking to himself and following out an idea of his own, "our dear Baroness is possibly labouring under a delusion. She has just been furnished with proof that her husband was not dead, as had been reported, in 1871, and that, moreover, he was still alive at the commencement of 1872. Granted! The evidence she has collected, and the letter she has at length received are proofs positive of that, and I accept them as such. But since then? There is nothing whatever to show that M. de Guéran has not succumbed during the course of the year now drawing to a close."

"I agree with you," replied M. Périères. "In a year he might surely have reached, either towards the south-west or south-east, some territory, comparatively speaking, civilized, and have had an opportunity of sending news about himself. Evidently, however, Madame de Guéran does not share our ideas; she wants to find out the key to the enigma, and we must help her to discover it."

"No need to tell me that!" said M. de Morin.

Conversing thus, they went along a road on the bank of the Blue River towards their house, which was in the very centre of Khartoum. It was past midnight, the ships in the port had, long ere this, put out their lights, and the road

was deserted. A few yards still separated them from the first houses of the inhabited part of the town, that is to say, the commercial quarter, when they saw a knot of six or seven persons who appeared to be wending their way to the Nile, and were walking parallel with them.

"Where are those people going at this time of night?" asked M. Périères. "They seem to be anxious not to be seen, for since they have perceived us, they have been hesitating, apparently, which direction to take."

"What does it matter to us?" replied M. de Morin. "They cannot have any motive for picking a quarrel with us, and, for the matter of that, in this charming country our revolvers never leave us."

"It is precisely for that reason that I propose to give them the benefit of our society; they interest me. We shall possibly find some curious specimen of their manners and customs to surprise us, and, to tell the truth, my dear fellow, I have up to now paid so very little attention to the customs of Khartoum that to-night I feel inclined to devote some of my time to them."

"Come along then," replied M. de Morin, who never objected to any proposition to throw himself headlong into some fresh adventure.

They hastened their steps and soon found themselves in close proximity to the people who had excited their curiosity.

"See!" exclaimed M. Périères. "They are carrying something."

"Yes, and that something looks very like a human form. A midnight burial, perhaps. The Nile, you know, like the Ganges and other great rivers, is often made a receptacle for corpses."

"Then their corpse is returning to life; it is struggling, defending itself, protesting, no doubt, against its destined tomb."

"You are right! It is no burial—it is assassination. We must interfere."

The band of men, seeing the pair coming towards them in hostile fashion, stopped, deposited their burden on the ground, surrounded it as if anxious to defend it, and assumed a threatening attitude.

CHAPTER XLIX.

The two Parisians ought to have halted a few yards from the gang, and have harangued or fought them there. They were armed with revolvers only, and, in a *mêlée*, fire-arms, of whatever description they be, frequently become of no use, because, if space for taking aim is not forthcoming, the firing must be all snap-shooting and without effect. But M. de Morin, carried away by his habitual impetuosity, rushed upon the gang, M. Périères followed him, and they found themselves in the midst of half a dozen men, armed with knives and very formidable curved swords.

This sudden dash into the ruck, which closed round the trio with corresponding rapidity, had, however, one advantage, for at their very feet, in the roadway, and, so to speak, under their protection, they saw the man or woman who, a moment previously, was being carried towards the Nile. This living body, bound, gagged, and enveloped, as with a winding-sheet, in a large white bûrnus, gave evident signs of life in a series of convulsive jumps which, under other circumstances, would have been diverting enough. It was for all the world like a fish thrown up on a river bank, wriggling, floundering, and

banging his tail about in lively, though futile fashion.

M. de Morin was stooping down to remove the winding-sheet when, by way of warning, he received a blow on his arm from a sword, fortunately without sustaining any injury. He sprang up and made a rush at his assailant, but stopped short suddenly on recognizing, in the star-light, the chief of the slave caravan, with whom, but a month previously, he had had such a sharp encounter.

The chief and his men simultaneously recognized the two Europeans, and their joy knew no bounds. At last all their enemies had been delivered into their hands, by mere chance, by the will of Allah. The Prophet had taken compassion on them, their cries for vengeance had reached him, their prayers had been heard. Not only had he given up to them M. Delange, who had ventured into the establishment of the Almehs, but he had also thrown in their way, at the dead of the night, and on the banks of the Nile, his companions. The thought that on two occasions in the same evening the Prophet had so manifestly shown his favour to them, could not fail to have a powerful influence on these fanatics, and it served to animate their courage. They made the grand mistake, nevertheless, of evidencing their joy prematurely, of relying too much on their superior strength, and, confident of victory, betrayed a secret which they would have done well to conceal. The chief, a European by birth, as we have

already said, and speaking French, after a fashion, was imprudent enough to exclaim—

"At last you are all three in our power!"

"All three!" cried M. Périéres, turning towards his friend.

They looked at each other, and took the whole thing in at a glance. The shapeless heap at their feet, the gagged and shrouded being could be no other than their companion, Dr. Delange. This unexpected revelation produced a complete and instantaneous change in their programme. It was no longer a question of risking their lives to save some unknown unfortunate, some ailing slave, as they had supposed, who was to be thrown into the Nile as the best means of disposing of such worthless property; the business in hand now was to rescue a fellow countryman, a friend, for whom they were ready to sacrifice themselves just as he would have done for them in similar circumstances.

"The fools!" whispered M. Périères in M. de Morin's ear. "And to think that I was just going to suggest getting out of this scrape as quietly as possible?"

"A brilliant idea that would have been!" replied M. de Morin. "What would have become of the poor Doctor? See, he has recognised our voices and is giving a few more evidences of vitality in order to attract our attention."

And, so saying, he was stooping down to take hold of the bûrnus once more, when Périères, seizing him by the arm, exclaimed—

"Wait. They are too near us. Let us clear the ground."

And, without waiting for a reply, he fired three random shots with his revolver.

These produced an immediate effect, for, though their adversaries were not hit, they recoiled, and so the circle was enlarged. MM. Périères and de Morin took advantage of this movement, and, without taking their eyes off the Arabs, who were already crowding in again upon them, they snatched away the bûrnus, and in a second had cut the thongs which bound M. Delange hand and foot, and relieved him of his gag.

"Phew!" said the Doctor, still confused and trying to stand up. "You are just in time. I thought it was all up with me. A thousand thanks. Have you a pistol?"

"No, but take the knife which served to release you."

"'Half a loaf is better than no bread.' Look out! Here they come!"

The Arabs, shouting and brandishing their swords, returned to the charge.

Two fresh shots from the revolvers resounded on the midnight air, but the balls took no effect, and the Arabs were unscathed.

"The game is not equal!" exclaimed M. de Morin. "Our task is ended. Let us run for it."

The danger must have been extreme indeed for M. de Morin to speak of flight. And it was so.

These three young men, armed with one knife and two revolvers, could not, as one half of their ammunition was already expended, struggle for any length of time with the slightest chance of

success against six men, furnished with swords and daggers. But the successive reports of the pistols, in a suburb of Khartoum and within a few yards of the inhabited portion of it, had attracted the attention of an Egyptian picket patrolling the town. As a rule, the soldiers who in Upper Egypt act as police only put in an appearance when they think there is no danger. If they do not hesitate to take strong measures against quarrelsome slaves and drunken negroes, they prudently avoid all interference in the disputes of the Mussulmen, slave dealers and scamps of all sorts, who, knife in hand, swarm about Khartoum. But a large portion of the Egyptian army is composed of prisoners taken in former days from the territories now annexed to Egypt, and those in whom the Government places the most reliance come from the Dinka tribe, fine, brave, soldier-like looking men. The slave merchants have for some time past abandoned all idea of dealing with this tribe, their indomitable character, their independent spirit, and, above all, their strength rendering them very dangerous customers. In the ranks of the army, on the contrary, although they are occasionally insubordinate, they render valuable service. The commanding officers themselves frequently belong to this tribe, and it was only last year that the Soudan contingent was under the command of Adam Pasha, a Dinka ex-prisoner.

The small picket, which, attracted by the noise, came to the assistance of the three

Europeans, was fortunately almost entirely composed of these picked men. As soon as they saw the Arabs, they advanced against them at the double, attacked them at close quarters, and dealt their blows right and left without apparently taking any thought of their own danger.

The struggle was soon over. Two Arabs took to flight, whilst the remaining four, hastily concealing their arms, began to bellow and shout, and maintained that they were the victims of an unprovoked attack on the part of the Europeans. The latter contented themselves with a shrug of the shoulders without trying to enter into any explanations, which, moreover, would have been utterly futile, seeing that the Dinkas could not have understood them. The matter ended, as it would have done in our own country, by the whole party being taken to the Egyptian station-house, situated in a square of Khartoum close to the Divan. The soldiers, however, treated the Europeans with the greatest courtesy, making them walk in front, without using any force, whereas on the slightest provocation they used both their fists and their feet on their other prisoners, whom they had recognised as slave dealers. The Dinkas hate these brutes, whom they, and on good grounds, reproach with having depopulated their country, and with still making razzias there for the purpose of seizing their women, celebrated for their culinary and household talents, and, for these reasons, eagerly sought after in every well-appointed harem.

When the station-house was reached, the Europeans succeeded in explaining matters to the officer on duty, and were at once set at liberty, whereas the traders were detained in durance vile to answer later on for their misdeeds.

At home once more, in the house occupied by them in the centre of Khartoum, the three Frenchmen, in spite of the excitement of the evening and the fatigues of the night, sat down to congratulate each other on their victory, and to talk over the expedition which had been resolved upon at Madame de Guéran's house.

"It is unnecessary to say," said M. de Morin, addressing M. Delange, "that I have no right to drag you into these stupid countries whither we are bound. The Niam-Niam, whose acquaintance we shall soon be called upon to make, are not provided by nature with tails, as many travellers have stated—that is certain. But it is still more certain, according to Piaggia, Poncet, Schweinfurth and many others, that they file their teeth to a point in order to facilitate their digestion of human flesh. Their neighbours, the Monbuttoos, are not one whit behind them from an anthropophagous point of view; indeed, it is currently reported of them that when very hungry they do not stop at disinterment. I, consequently, my dear fellow, am not inhuman enough to devote your body to the refreshment of these interesting races."

"De Morin might have added," continued M.

Périères, puffing away at his cigar with much gusto, and emitting clouds of smoke, to the great annoyance of the numerous mosquitoes, "that those travellers who are not fortunate enough to be eaten, generally speaking die of fatigue and want. Without going very far afield for examples, I may mention the Italian Miani, who in 1870 was the Director of the Acclimatization Society in this town. He left for the South in 1871, as we are going to do, and, a few months afterwards, he wrote in his note-book the touching words I read this morning, 'I have no strength to write—I am suffering horribly—I have had a trench dug for my grave, and my servants have come to kiss my hands, and say—God grant that you may not die!—Adieu, all my hopes! Adieu, the dreams of my life! Adieu, Italy, for whose liberty I once fought!'"

"You see," resumed M. de Morin, "that the countries whither we are bound are not altogether satisfactory. Resume your liberty once more, and be sure that we shall never forget all that you have done for us up to to-day."

"With your permission," answered M. Delange, "I am off to bed, and to-morrow morning you shall know my decision. You have just saved my life, and I feel that, to-night, I should be influenced by that fact."

CHAPTER L.

The answer of Dr. Delange was not long delayed, and the following morning he announced his intention of joining the expedition. This result might have been foreseen, for, when a journey is in question, hesitation exists at the moment of departure alone. When fairly on the road, vacillating characters lose their indecision, and bear testimony to the truth of the proverb, "*Il n'y a que le premier pas qui coûte.*" Ties hard to break are formed amongst the travellers; services rendered by one to another create new duties for each, *amour-propre* enters into the calculation, no one member of the community wants to be under an obligation to another, nobody will give way whilst his neighbour holds out, and each one would blush for a desertion which would be condemned by all.

Again, in dangerous undertakings such as that we are discussing, gratitude as well as *amour-propre* has somewhat to say. A very serious kind of treaty, a treaty of life and death, is entered upon by the various components of the caravans—"I was almost lost to-day when you saved me; to-morrow it will be my turn to save you." In this way Dr. Delange, having rescued M. de Morin from the Bedouins of El-Hejaz, scored the first game. M. de Morin had

just won the second; the conqueror had to be played, and the Doctor, like the thorough gambler that he was, did not care about leaving the *partie* undecided.

And now that we are speaking of gambling, we ought to mention that M. Delange had by no means given up the *parties* prescribed by his contract. Only, because M. de Morin had of late shown himself disinclined both for baccarat and écarté, the Doctor, not to drive him to desperation, had offered him credit for a few weeks, on condition that he would wipe off the score later on. They were already twenty *parties*, of a thousand francs each, behindhand, and that alone held out to M. Delange an agreeable prospect for the future; for, adding these twenty to the one per diem agreed upon, he saw before him a gambling horizon of stupendous proportions. Africa and its dreaded tribes disappeared, and he only saw cards, nothing but cards, strewing his onward path. They smoothed away all the rough places, and levelled all the precipices on the road. And we may as well add that the exploration fever, confessed to by so many others, had seized upon him, and had awakened in him the hitherto lalent instincts of a traveller.

MM. de Morin and Périères were consequently accompanied by Dr. Delange, when, on the following day, they betook themselves to Madame de Guéran. She had herself summoned to the conference Miss Beatrice Poles, and the Dinka Nassar, who had brought her the

letter from her husband, as well as the two Arab interpreters, whose devotion had been so conspicuous during the first portion of the expedition. The trusty Joseph, also summoned, responded to the call. It had been vainly expected that he would have resolved upon returning to France, but he persisted in being one of the party with an obstinacy, of which Miss Poles, who could not bear the sight of him, had divined the real motive.

Joseph hoped to make a rapid fortune in Africa, and to find an opening for two branches of industry—ivory and slaves. In his idea, these two businesses were inseparable; ivory and slaves were one and the same thing. He had read that a few pieces of copper, or a yard or two of calico, or a packet of needles, would, in certain regions, buy a young girl, about fifteen, who would be easily exchanged in another tribe for an elephant's tusk. The copper, calico, or needles represented a value of four or five francs, whereas tusks would be sold in Europe at a rate of from five hundred to seven hundred and fifty francs. The business, conducted on a large scale, was therefore magnificent, and Joseph did not feel inclined to forego it. In addition to this, he was rather pleased with the idea of becoming for some time the proprietor of a certain number of slaves, and he proposed, by means of them, to relieve himself of a portion of his work, and to enjoy all the advantages of a servant free from all expense, and a master who had nothing to do.

Our European colony thus retained its original dimensions, and required merely an escort and the proper complement of bearers. A consultation was held on this point, the inconvenience of a large following having been confessed by every traveller. Large caravans have the credit, at all events, of spreading terror along their route, and of assuming an attitude of open hostility against the native population, still in a state of barbarism, it is true, but free, nevertheless, to put their veto on the inroad of armed people into their territories. Why should we do in Africa what we should not allow anybody to do in Europe? Should we allow armed negroes to march from one end to the other of France or England? Livingstone, Mungo Park, Major Laing, René Caillié, Grant, Speke, Cameron, Barth, Vögel, and plenty of other travellers never dreamt of pursuing their explorations with a countless escort.

Nevertheless, these reflections are not quite as just as they seem to be, for the travellers, whose names we have mentioned, were content to travel slowly, ever temporizing and substituting tact and patience for force. They often remained entire years at the mercy of the chief of some petty tribe? What did it matter to them? It only gave them greater opportunities for studying the country under every aspect and condition, to the manifest advantage of all branches of science. And, at the same time, the tribes amongst whom they lived became familiar with their manners and customs, and were improved in consequence, the explorers in this way becom-

ing apostles and missionaries. But our caravan had another end in view; their object was to recover an explorer, a bold pioneer, lost, or strayed, or, perhaps, in imminent danger of his life. They had no time to lose, and could not brook the delays incidental to a scientific expedition or an apostolic mission. Moreover, if we do not allow armed strangers to wander through France, we, at least, offer them certain guarantees against danger which we can scarcely find in Africa. When that country shall have provided itself with railways, gendarmes, sergents-de-ville, or policemen, we shall no longer require armed and costly escorts.

It was decided, therefore, that attention should only be paid, within certain limits, of course, to the advice of single travellers, and that the number of soldiers and bearers should be reduced, as far as possible, consistently with the expedition being strong enough to force its way in case of necessity, to inspire respect, and repulse any attack. Nassar and the two interpreters received orders to engage fifty experienced soldiers who had already accompanied expeditions to the south, and from this escort Arabs were to be excluded on account of their always being prone to look upon the districts to be explored as conquered countries, continually maltreating the inhabitants, and exciting quarrels. In default of Dinkas, Nubians were to be chosen, not for any courage or habits of discipline that they possess, but because they are good shots, inured to the climate, and expert pioneers. Neither were they likely to desert,

because they would leave their country with the caravan, and would naturally be interested in returning with it. The leaders of the expedition, indeed, could not, without grave imprudence, engage any people belonging to the tribes they were about to visit, lest, when they arrived at their own homes, they should be tempted to remain there.

Thanks to all these precautions, the small force of soldiers was rapidly recruited, made up of good material, and armed with excellent carbines purchased in France and brought to Khartoum by the Nile from Cairo, whence they had been forwarded with all the other heavy baggage three months previously. As soon as the ranks of the escort were filled up, it was placed under the command of Nassar, who was, however, not to adopt any measure of importance without previous consultation with MM. Périères and Delange, his immediate chiefs. All these men were duly enlisted at the Divan, and signed an agreement to pay implicit obedience to the Europeans, who were at the same time invested with the power of punishment or reward, according to circumstances. According to the custom in vogue in the districts of the White River, five months' pay was handed over in advance, the remainder to be paid on the return of the expedition.

The question of bearers was quite as serious, but, thanks to the assistance of the Egyptian authorities, contracts were entered into with ivory merchants, holders of stations (seribas)

in the southern districts. These traders undertook, as soon as the expedition, leaving the river, advanced by land, to furnish from one hundred and fifty to two hundred men as porters, to carry the baggage, presents of all kinds, such as glass beads, copper, and cotton goods, and, more important than all, the provisions necessary for so numerous a body.

The escort settled, the three Parisians, assisted now by Madame de Guéran and Miss Poles, turned their attention to laying in a stock of brandy, tea, coffee, compressed vegetables, and spices. To the various articles brought from France to serve as presents or exchanges, they added a large quantity of English calico and coarse check, called *troumba*. Finally, an ample stock of ammunition—powder, bullets, lead, and cartridges was laid in, and packed in iron cases, with locks and keys, for it must be remembered that the negroes are very much given to waste on a large scale, and it is prudent to take precautions to prevent their habit of firing in the air now and again for amusement. All this immense paraphernalia was by degrees put on board the four vessels purchased by the Europeans, the neggher or noggor which had brought them from Berber to Khartoum, and three decked boats known on the Nile under the name of dahabiéh. One of the latter was fitted up for the conveyance of a few donkeys and ten horses, destined for the use of the Europeans, their interpreters, and their executive officer, Nassar.

The whole flotilla was to be towed for a portion of the way, as far as the Gazelle River, by a steamer, belonging to the Government and ordered to proceed to Gondokoro, in search of Baker, whose military mission would expire on the 1st April, 1873.

The preparations were all completed by the end of January. There was nothing then to detain our European colony at Khartoum, and it was at liberty to commence that terrible journey which for so long a time took such hold of both Europe and America.

* * * * * *

"My dear Pommerelle and Desrioux, for, as you say you always meet to read our letters, this one is addressed to you both. I write to you in my own name, and those of de Morin and Delange, who are too much occupied with our final preparations for departure to say good-bye to you as they could have wished.

"We hope to embark in an hour's time, if we can manage to collect our sailors, escort, and servants, the whole lot having been undiscoverable and unmanageable ever since they handled their five months' pay, and are evidently bent on leaving their last piastre in the purlieus of Khartoum.

"I have, in my former letters, posted you both up fully as regards our projected plans, which have not been altered in the least. We are going to bear in a straight line southward as far as the seriba, where Nassar states he en-

tertained M. de Guéran. There we shall endeavour to hit upon and follow up the track of our fellow-countryman; but it is evident, as far as de Morin and I are concerned, that if we had known in France as much about the Baron as we have learnt in Khartoum, we should have mapped out a very different plan of operations.

"In reality, if M. de Guéran has succeeded, as he seems in his letter to expect, in crossing the frontier of the Monbuttoos and making either Lake Albert Nyanza or Lake Tanganyika, we are simply going to follow in his footsteps, without any chance of overtaking him. If, on the contrary, we had started from Zanzibar, by way of Kazé, in a north-westerly direction, we might have met him actually coming towards us, and, in any case, we could have reached, from that side, the unknown countries he proposed to visit just as easily as by the Monbuttoo territory. If we could begin *de novo*, we should therefore start from Zanzibar. But these reflections are futile and all regrets superfluous.

"Good-bye, then, my dear friends, from all of us. Do not quite forget us, take our part against those who call us fools, and if you never hear from us more, say to yourselves that we died thinking of you and our beloved France."

END OF VOL. I.

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